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JUNGLE STORIES



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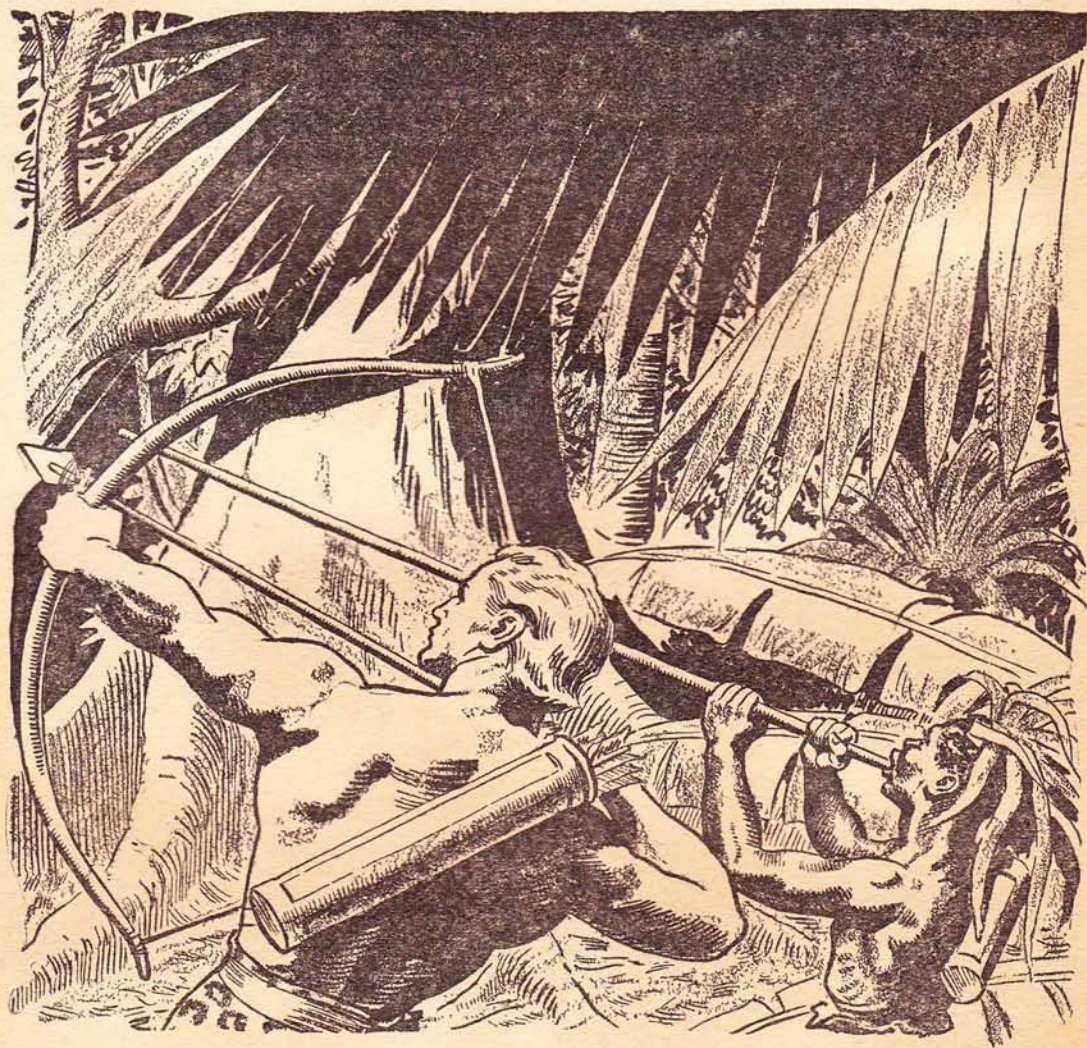
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The Monsters of Voo Doo Isle

By JOHN PETER DRUMMOND

A death-trail lured Ki-Gor to The Isle of Mists, and a god of weird powers welcomed him. His golden mate had already fallen prey to this strange Master—and now the Jungle Lord would share her fate . . . become a slaving, mindless creature whose great hands would kill for evil.



ABOUT the tall, lean white man and the squat, thick-bodied black who trailed at his heels there was an air of urgency and a certain furtive watchfulness.

With his carefully tailored clothes, his precise grooming, the white man at first

glance was out of place against the wild, primeval backdrop of the Congo. Yet despite the clearly discernible anxiety that drove him forward, he moved with practiced assurance along the winding game trail.

The squat native who served him gave

scant attention to the track they followed. Even a white man could follow a spoor as plain as the one they stalked. The black, however, was as tense and wary as his master. His hard eyes endlessly combed the jungle walls about them. The least shift in the forest's raucous noise pattern brought him up listening.

Plainly, the two men hunted, but they were not hunters in the usual sense. Likewise, though their tense watchfulness revealed fear of discovery, it was not discovery by their quarry, but by other men that they so anxiously sought to avoid.

Where the jungle trail sloped down to a stream crossing, they stopped. The air from the hollow rose sweet with the scent of unnumbered blossoms along the water's edge. Scarlet, yellow and purple flowers massed in a riot of color.

The two men's eyes focused on a spot where the blossoms lay crushed and trampled. They studied intently two huge imprints in the soft mud of the bank. The footprints were of a size to bring gasps of amazement from any sportsman.

But the white man's only reaction was a bitter twist of his lips, a dart of anger in his black, unblinking eyes. He glanced accusingly at the native and the black flinched as though a lash touched him. His eyes belied his suave, patrician look, betrayed the thing that linked him in close brotherhood with the Congo. In the staring, seething blackness of his eyes was revealed his blood kinship with this cruel, green world, a oneness with the ruthless killer beasts who stalked the Congo trails.

"He cannot be far ahead," he snapped. "When we come on him, *this time* keep your head." His voice was harsh, threatening.

"Yes, doktor," hastily answered the native, his guttural pronunciation of "doctor" being uttered with a tinge of awe and fear. The title was voiced like the name of a deity.

Branches snapped and rustled across the stream. A troop of baboons, coughing and barking among themselves, swung along upwind from the two men. They headed through the trees, paralleling the trail and soon moved from view. The ill-tempered tree tribe was out of sight hardly a minute when their voices, harsh with anger rose in violent, staccato barks.

The white man listened to the clamor,

turned inquiringly to the squat native.

"Some one comes," the black replied to the unspoken question. The native knew from experience only sight of a man aroused the ugly-tempered baboons to such violence.

"He must not see us," warned the doctor. The warrior nodded. His right hand reached almost too eagerly for the bow hung across his shoulder.

"One quiet arrow," he promised, "and he will see nothing."

"No," the white man decided, leading the native swiftly behind a concealing growth of shrubs. "We must not attract attention. By killing him we might bring searchers."

THE two men squatted in hiding, suppressing the urge to slap away the vicious gnats swarming in the foliage. They saw a small sturdy figure come up to the stream at a soundless trot. He was a pygmy, one of the strange, savage, little people who drifted like ghosts through the jungle, a people ruthless in war, feared and respected for their bravery and cunning.

Muscles rippled smoothly in his arms and shoulders as the little man bent to drink. There was a regal grace in his movements, hidden power in his taut, hard body. The careless manner in which he held his blow gun showed he did not suspect the presence of the hidden men.

The pygmy crouched long by the stream, slowly drinking the cool water. Directly across from him, pressed deep in the soft mud, were the two immense footprints. They were prints to excite any native, especially an ever-curious pygmy. The small man rose, however, trotted through the water and passed the unusual spoor without so much as a glance.

When the slight figure disappeared, the white man stood up, slapping the stinging gnats away from his face and hands. The black rose, too, expelled his breath with a sigh.

"It is good we did not slay him," he told his master. "I recognize the small one. He is N'Geeso, chief of the pygmies. His men would comb the forest to find his killers."

The doctor made no reply. For just such reason he had forbidden an arrow from

ambush. He stared at the monster tracks squashed deep in the mud.

"Odd," he said, half to himself. "He ran right by the tracks without noticing them." Then he shrugged his shoulders as though it were of no consequence and plunged forward, his long legs endeavoring to make up the time lost.

His hard-faced companion did not dismiss so easily the memory of the pygmy chieftain's action, but he kept his thoughts to himself, knowing they would anger his master. Experience had taught him an immense respect for the pygmies. He knew it was second nature for the keen-eyed N'Geeso to read every sign on the trail. The fact that the little man gave no attention to the giant tracks only proved he was already familiar with them and with the means of their origin.

And a secret in the hands of a pygmy was no longer a secret. Yet the black man held his tongue. Perhaps they could finish their mission and get away before N'Geeso could act. In any case, he dared not give any additional bad news to the doctor.

Shortly, they came to a fallen tree. The long-dead trunk half blocked the trail, and its position and the freshly torn turf about it told the story. Some creature of immense power had lifted the rotting trunk from the underbrush and tossed it into the trail. The soft damp wood on the underside was scratched and ripped where huge fingers had searched for grubs.

"See! He begins to search for food," the doctor exclaimed. "His hunger will trap him for us."

The two men pushed forward at a faster gait. Their quarry was only a few minutes ahead. The white man's bow was tightly set, his unblinking eyes fierce and determined. The native loosened the small pack he carried, shrugged it from his shoulders, carried it ready in his hand.

The jungle was abruptly silent. It was the strained, ominous quiet that falls when fear grasps the forest's teeming small life. Then ahead sounded the rending split of wood. A branch had been sheared from a tree, and the noise resounded like a blast.

The doctor broke into a run now. Even his untrained ears caught the crackle of trampled shrubs, the snap of branches forced aside by a ponderous slow moving body. Perspiration streamed down the white man's tense face.



Ki-Gor and Helene.

A green sweep of vines a hundred feet further on shivered and ripped apart. A giant figure burst through the wire-strong tangle, stood clearly revealed in the trail. He was huge as a massive stone idol.

His hairy body was hideous in its size, rearing more than twice as tall as a man, with a gross and monstrous breadth. He stepped forward, balancing on awkward, over-size feet, his long arms dangling to his knees.

Atop the mountain of flesh, the creature's bulbous, misshapen head sat grotesquely. There was a formlessness about his features, as though the face were wax that had partially melted. The poorly mated eyes moved slowly, taking overly long to focus on objects. Through some deformity of the neck muscles, the creature's head sagged always to the left and forward.

The beast swayed dully in the trail. His sluggish mind struggled to decide on his next move. In his posture, his hairy body, his long arms, was a kinship with the great apes. Yet no ape who shattered the Congo morning with a fearsome challenge could stand in combat before this monster for long.

"Quick! Quick! The pack!" the white man's command came.

THE native placed the bundle in his master's outstretched hand, then stood away as the white man advanced more slowly, opening the pack as he neared the

beast. He showed no fear, made no move, for the gun looped over his shoulder.

"Moldar," he called, his voice cracking like a pistol shot.

The giant swung to face him. The dull eyes focused slowly. The vast, sluggish body swayed indecisively. Then as mighty muscles tensed, it appeared the creature would lunge to the attack.

The white man sensed the threat. He halted, but continued to talk. He was small and insignificant before the towering black bulk.

"Quiet, Moldar," he ordered. "Here's food." From the pack he drew an aromatic loaf. It was a mixture of foods pressed together.

"Catch!" he said, and tossed the loaf at the beast.

At the word catch, the creature's arm snapped out with surprising speed, snared the loaf in mid-air. He crammed the loaf into his mouth, devouring it with a gulp. Then he waved an arm forward again, growls rumbling from his deep chest.

The white man held out another loaf, and walking slowly away from the giant, called him to follow. The creature refused to budge. His only reaction was the increased violence of his snarls.

The doctor's voice grew sharper. He threw another loaf, then tried again to lead the beast away. This time the monster stopped his rumbling, listened attentively to the command voice.

The doctor retreated further down the trail, holding the loaf invitingly in view. The beast swayed forward, began to follow with ponderous steps. The tight muscles in the doctor's face relaxed, he fell into a normal walk. The native reappeared, smiling at his master's triumph. The heavy tread of the following giant slowed, then stopped. The white man swung around to face the creature. This time he was relaxed, confident.

"Moldar," he called.

He knew the beast would follow him now.

II

KI-GOR, White Lord of the Jungle, raced down the narrow game trail with effortless grace. Despite his ground-eating pace, his great body moved with

velvet ease. He was a tall, superbly proportioned man, with a deeply tanned, hard-muscled body that tapered from broad shoulders to slim hips.

Like a figure from pagan mythology, he glided through the tumbled wilderness of tropical vegetation. His muscle-corded body was naked but for a leopard-skin breachclout. At his waist was a long, ivory handled knife. The quiver on his back was filled with arrows, and in his right hand he carried a powerful bow.

Ki-Gor moved through the jungle not as a white hunter or even a native. He stalked the dim trails as a creature of the wild, an equal in stealth and cunning of the wariest forest denizen.

He paused now, relishing the pleasure of the hunt. He gave his head a quick toss, throwing his blond mane into place. Though he stalked only a springbok, he took the keenest enjoyment in matching his skill against the fleet, wily animal. His keen ears caught no hint of the springbok's nearness, but his sensitive nostrils searched out the creature's scent.

Ki-Gor veered from the trail, slid wraithlike through the seemingly impenetrable mesh of fern and vine. His cautious tread was further cushioned by the thick, damp carpet of rotting leaves.

The White Lord shifted the bow to his left hand, fitted an arrow to it with practiced skill. Except for the quick shift of his blue eyes, he was relaxed. The springbok's warm, fresh scent grew stronger as he worked his way upwind toward his quarry.

A lane opened between the trees. The gazelle grazed daintily at the far end. Ki-Gor raised his bow in a smooth, swift gesture. The springbok caught the movement. From complete repose the animal exploded into action, leaped with all its amazing power toward a dense stand of kunai grass. Its soaring bound came incredibly fast.

But Ki-Gor's reactions outraced his quarry's. Suddenly taut muscles knotted and curled on his brawny arms and shoulders. The great bow, too powerful for an average man to draw, bent like a reed under Ki-Gor's quick power.

Too fast to follow, the long arrow sped toward the leaping springbok. The missile struck with the abrupt, flat sound of a slapping palm. The creature convulsed in

its arcing flight, and writhing, disappeared into the thick kunai grass. There was a brief, surging rustle, then silence.

Ki-Gor trotted into the grass a few yards and surveyed his kill. With jungle caution, he listened a moment, made certain of his own safety before kneeling beside his quarry. Then he drew his knife, and with deft strokes, severed a few choice cuts. He wrapped the meat in a broad, cool leaf, tied it with a vine so that he carried it slung beside his quiver.

His mission completed, Ki - Gor's thoughts turned immediately to his golden mate, Helene, waiting for his return at Silver River. Though he had been away from her only a few brief hours, he felt an overwhelming longing to see her, to hear her soft, laughing voice.

As a man of action, brought up in a savage, primitive world, Ki-Gor was little given to introspection. He seldom considered the drastic change in his existence, in his very being, that had taken place since the red-haired American girl had literally crashed into his life. He rarely thought beyond that day when Helene's airplane developed engine trouble on a trans-continental hop and made a forced landing in the jungle.

Ki-Gor started back along the trail, but soon grew impatient at the slow pace of ground travel. Securing his bow, he caught a length of liana, and with a powerful thrust of his lithe body, swung to a low hanging bough. He ran along the branch, catapulted upward to reach the middle branches, and began to move eastward toward the clearing and Helene.

Ki-Gor drove in an almost straight line for awhile, then adjusted his course to more or less parallel the main trail that led toward the river. His watchful eye soon caught sight of a sturdy little figure leisurely trotting in the same direction the White Lord followed. Ki-Gor studied the jogging man intently a few moments, then, recognizing his small friend, N'Geeso, he smiled with pleasure. He started to swing down to the trail, overtake the pygmy chief. But a better idea struck him, broadened his smile.

The White Lord was unable to resist a joke at N'Geeso's expense. Obviously, the little chief headed for Ki-Gor's camp. It would startle and puzzle him if when

he arrived a third plate of food awaited him. The pygmy would not rest until he learned how Ki-Gor came to expect him.

Chuckling to himself, Ki-Gor began framing outlandish tales of magical powers with which to harass N'Geeso. The White Lord swung in a wide arc around the trotting native to escape discovery. Then he began to race along the tree routes with dizzy speed.

TWICE as he neared the camp, Ki-Gor gave a distinctive thrilling whistle to warn Helene of his coming. The sound came back like a soft musical echo as his mate replied. The red-haired girl stood waiting in the clearing as Ki-Gor plunged from the trees, landed before her.

She was a fitting mate to the White Lord of the Jungle. Spotlit by a column of sunlight, she was breath-takingly beautiful as she waited. The sun struck glints of fire from her long hair, high-lighted every curve of her golden body. She frowned quizzically, but laughter was in her blue eyes.

Helene knew Ki-Gor well, knew his hurtling entrance meant some prank was in the offing.

"Now, what trick are you up to, Ki-Gor?" she asked, pursing her lips in mock severity.

"Ho, woman, is that a way to greet a great hunter who brings you food," Ki-Gor said in the lordly manner of a native chief addressing one of many wives.

The bronzed giant glanced critically around the clearing as he took the bundle of meat from his back. His eyes halted on the almost dead fire.

"Why is my meal not prepared?" he asked loudly. "So you spend the day playing with that worthless monkey, Boko, instead of working. I should sell you both to the Arabs."

At the mention of his name, Helene's pet monkey came scrambling across the clearing. He stopped beside his mistress, turned his old man's face admiringly toward her.

"You're a worse monkey than Boko," declared Helene. "In the first place, I had nothing to cook until my husband could find some old blind creature he was able to kill. Second, you never will eat this early."

"So? Then must I cook my own food?"

Ki-Gor sped past Helene. Moving like one possessed, he grabbed up an armful of fire wood, blew the fire into quick life. He sliced generous portions of meat, put them to cooking. The clearing was on the bank of Silver River, and Ki-Gor raced up the bank to the first waterfall above the camp. He darted along a narrow shelf of rock that led behind the waterfall. Behind the fall was a small cave which provided an ideal natural ice box. Ki-Gor emerged from this storehouse carrying fish, a variety of fruits, yams, bananas and nuts.

He had the meal under way in surprisingly short time. Only then did he venture to answer the stream of questions with which Helene pestered him. Pleased at his success in teasing her, he caught his lithe mate up in his arms, carried her to their customary eating place.

He recounted how he discovered N'Geeso, and explained his plan to emphasize how utterly without surprise was the pygmy's surprise visit. Ki-Gor wanted to worry his impish friend by claiming he knew through some myterious means the pygmy's every move.

Helene entered into the prank wholeheartedly. She placed three sets of gourd dishes on fresh green leaves. Meanwhile, Ki-Gor heaped a large platter with food, set it in the center of the dining place. Then Helene and he sat waiting.

They knew from experience N'Geeso would suddenly materialize at the edge of the clearing, shout a loud greeting, and wait for their startled reaction.

He appeared as they knew he would. The bantam warrior, silent as a shadow, slid from the jungle behind Ki-Gor's back. He shattered the air with the traditional greeting: "Ho! I come without weapons! Ho! A friend comes!"

Neither Helene nor Ki-Gor moved a muscle. In a lazy drawling voice, Ki-Gor called over his shoulder, "You grow old, friend N'Geeso, to travel so slowly. Come, before your meal is cold."

N'Geeso's mouth dropped open. His face betrayed how well the tables were turned, how confounded he was. He rushed forward, stared at the place set for him, at favorite foods obviously prepared for him alone. His shrewd eyes searched Ki-Gor's pleasant, but unrevealing face.

Helene further deflated him. "It is good

to see you, N'Geeso. I was pleased three days ago when Ki-Gor said you were coming."

THE little man collapsed heavily into his eating place. He scratched one leg aimlessly.

"It cannot be," he said huskily, "Why," he protested, "I did not even know myself three days ago." He stared at the food, peered once more into Ki-Gor's face. When at last he spoke, his voice was low.

"So the great Ki-Gor, the one who so long has smiled at the witchdoctors, now takes up their practices himself. Only a witchdoctor could know I was coming, could know the exact time."

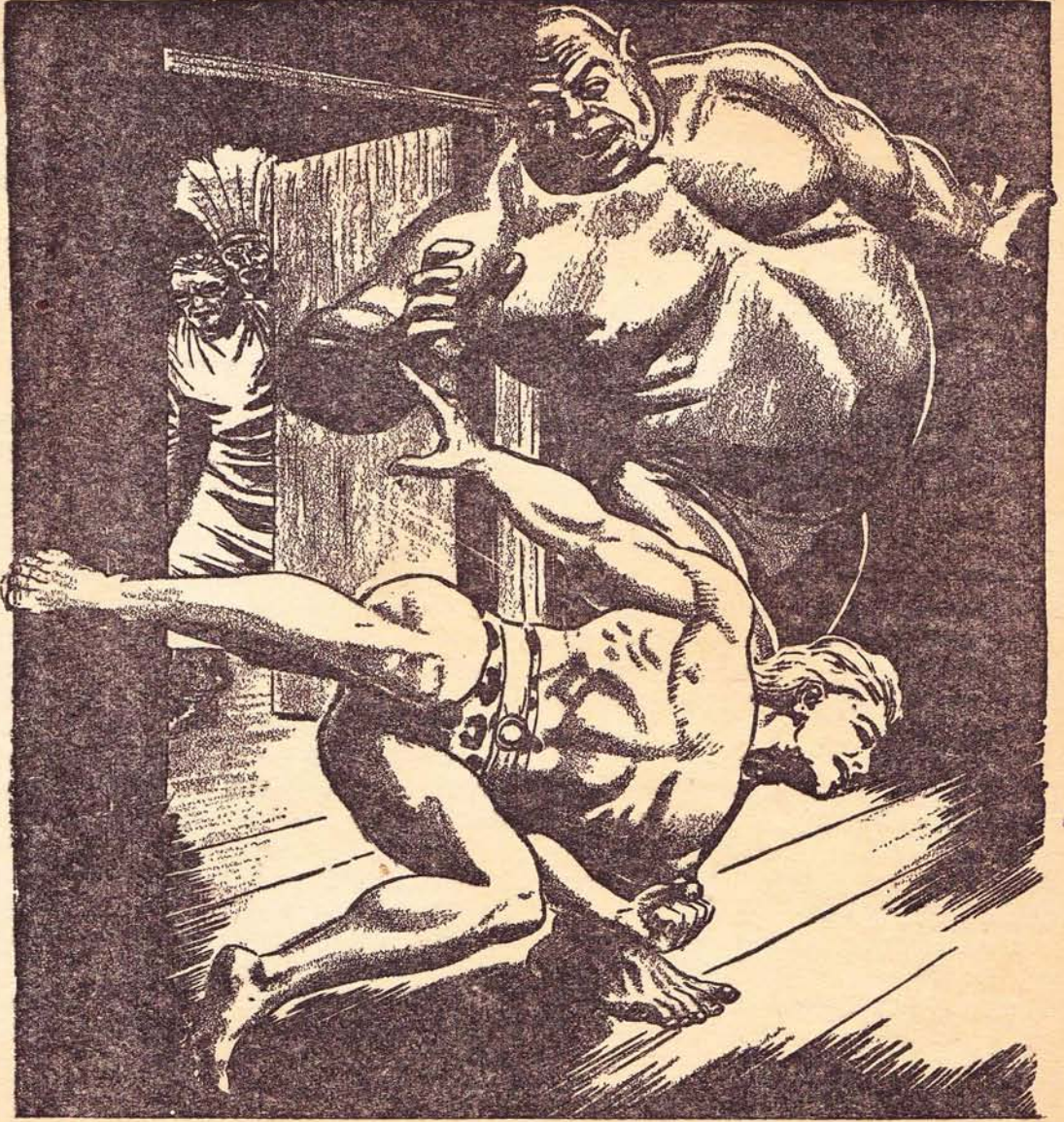
Ki-Gor devoted his attention to heaping the pygmy's plate with food. Helene insisted on individual plates, and though at first Ki-Gor thought it foolish, he had grown to like the custom. N'Geeso ate slowly, advancing solution after solution as to how Ki-Gor knew of his visit, returning always the answer that it was witchcraft.

At last, the White Lord could restrain himself no longer. He burst out with a booming laugh, explained the whole matter to the little chief. N'Geeso was relieved immediately, and helping his plate again, began to recover his spirits. Casting about for a way to reestablish his prestige, he remembered the real reason for his visit.

"It is a good trick," N'Geeso declared. "We can use it again soon." He smiled happily as he imparted the next news. "My men discovered Masai warriors approaching five suns ago. They watch them every hour of the day and night. Our friend, Tembu George leads them here."

Ki-Gor's gray eyes twinkled at the obvious delight which the pygmy took in bedeviling his great friend and rival for Ki-Gor's affections, Tembu George, mighty chieftain of the Masai.

N'Geeso's purpose in having his men follow Tembu George's progress was clear. It appealed to N'Geeso's sense of humor to make the Masai warriors seem like inept, clumsy woodsmen. N'Geeso, at every possible opportunity told Tembu George he crashed through the jungle like an old, blind elephant. Since every warrior prided himself on his jungle craft, by checking on Tembu George's every move,



Ki-Gor threw all his power into the desperate lunge.

and by informing Ki-Gor of his approach, the pygmy could have a marvelous time in belittling the Masai's skill.

N'Geeso and Tembu George were Ki-Gor's staunchest friends. Any one of the trio would make any possible sacrifice for another. Together they would face any danger, and their past exploits already were jungle legend. But the giant Masai and the pygmy chieftain, to hear them talk, were deadly, scornful rivals.

"Tembu George will be so ashamed when we finish with him, he won't be able to lift his head," rejoiced the pygmy.

"What makes you think he doesn't know about your men?" put in Helene. "Knowing Tembu George, he is probably waiting

for the proper time to capture them all. It would please him to bring them here tied up on poles like wild pigs."

N'Geeso sobered, knowing the Masai chief was fully capable of just such villainy. But he had detailed his best warriors to watch the Masai. He relaxed, assuring himself it was not likely his men would be taken unawares.

"I suppose Tembu George will want us to hunt with him," the pygmy suggested innocently.

"He likes to hunt," Ki-Gor said.

For a minute, N'Geeso pursued the subject no further. He watched Helene playing with Boko. The flame-haired girl was teaching the monkey to bring her articles.

She would show Boko a stick or a piece of fruit, then toss it a few yards away, coax him to bring it to her. Monkey-like, Boko's interest in the game always waned quickly, but for a time he would obediently fetch the thrown article at Helene's command, "Bring it here."

"What will you hunt?" asked N'Geeso, abruptly resuming his favorite subject of Tembu George.

"Two lions are killing men near Lake Cama," said Ki-Gor. "We will hunt them."

"Ho," grunted N'Geeso. "The man-eaters are sport enough for an ordinary hunter like Tembu George. But I know where there is greater game."

The little man glanced sidewise, his keen eyes judging the Jungle Lord's interest. In his voice was an excitement he could not subdue.

"I know a trail that only the brave can follow, only those who walk without fear, kill with the lightnings' swiftness. The man who makes this kill will be known throughout the jungle."

KI-GOR grunted to show he was listening, threw a twig at Boko. What weird tale was the little man concocting now to make the hunt with Tembu George seem a pale affair?

"I am a great hunter," N'Geeso proclaimed. "My men urged that I make the kill alone. But I thought of my friend, Ki-Gor. I wanted to share my good fortune with him."

"All the jungle praises your generosity," said Ki-Gor. But only Helene caught the wry humor in his tone.

"This one is a giant, many times taller than you, and with shoulders broader than a man can jump." N'Geeso declared, his voice growing excited. "*Aaaiieeee!* He is hairy like an ape, but his step shatters the earth and all the evil of the night is in his voice."

Ki-Gor noted the flame that kindled in the pygmy's eyes. N'Geeso's face was deadly serious. Had N'Geeso seen something unusual, or was this another native rumor grown even larger in the retelling?

"Tembu George will be pleased to share such a hunt with us," Ki-Gor said.

N'Geeso's expressive hands made a deprecating gesture, then the wily pygmy caught himself, remembered to use guile.

"We cannot wait," he said flatly. "We must hunt at once or the chance will be gone." At Ki-Gor's questioning glance he continued, "A strange white hunter follows the trail."

"What?" Ki-Gor was abruptly interested. He knew of no white man in this area. "You saw this man?"

"I saw his spoor on the trail," replied N'Geeso. "He tracks the giant."

"Then we will go at once," the White Lord decided.

But his reason for going was not what the delighted N'Geeso believed. He still placed little faith in the tale of a giant ape. But if a white man had entered his territory, he must have a look at him. With renegade whites always came trouble. No white man other than Ki-Gor was supposed to be within hundreds of miles of this dense little-known Congo spot.

Ki-Gor rose, stood towering above the pygmy, a far-away look in his eyes. It was puzzling that a stranger requiring guides and the help of native tribes could travel the Congo without the jungle telegraph betraying his presence. Yet not once had the throbbing drums mentioned an intruder.

When Ki-Gor's decision was made, Helene was instantly ready to go. She quickly brought him his weapons. Boko, although uninvited, made it clear he intended to follow his mistress.

Looking on the trip as only a small adventure, Ki-Gor and Helene were gay and happy as they left the clearing. N'Geeso trotted behind the jungle couple, and listening to their carefree talk, his own elation drained away, his face grew solemn. A pang of fear, of regret, darted through him.

The White Lord's skill was the greatest in the jungle, and his bravery was unquestioned. Yet fresh in N'Geeso's memory was the hulking monster that smashed trees aside like shrubs. He alone was responsible for leading Ki-Gor on this dangerous mission and, suddenly, N'Geeso was afraid for his great friend.

III

N'GEESO trailed the jungle couple in silence for a long while. He was bewildered by the sudden doubts which assailed him. Time and again he started to call to the White Lord, urge him to turn

back. He was utterly devoted to Ki-Gor and Helene, and he could not bear to think he might cause them harm.

But when he thought of the devil beast, he could not turn back. In the jungle, a great hunter was respected above all. If he could share in killing this monster, N'Geeso's name would be spoken with respect in the furthest corner of the Congo. This was the chance of a lifetime, and the little man could not let it pass.

HE watched the White Lord's easy stride, heard his carefree voice. Ki-Gor's every move revealed the immense strength and vitality that throbbed in his muscled body. The smooth play of his long, hard muscles held N'Geeso's eye.

The pygmy chief was suddenly reassured. The White Lord of the Jungle was not a man like other men. The gray-eyed, steel-nerved jungle man was a figure to command respect and confidence.

N'Geeso smiled. He was an old woman to doubt the powers of the mighty Ki-Gor. He was a fool to worry that his friend could not outwit the huge but stupid beast.

As his bouyant spirits returned, he savored the thought of Tembu George's arrival. He planned how he would carefully refer to hunting down the monster, thereby squelching completely the tales of prowess the Masai leader intended to relate.

Though Ki-Gor lay little faith in N'Geeso's story of a strange monster, he took increasing note of the little man's certainty of action, N'Geeso took the lead when they left the neighborhood of Ki-Gor's camp. Without wasted motion, the pygmy hurried them along a network of paths toward the creature's haunts. Ki-Gor expected at most to find some unusually vicious or hunger-maddened animal. N'Geeso's movements grew more stealthy as they progressed. He was cool as always on a hunt, but Ki-Gor, from long experience, knew the pygmy was unusually cautious.

Then N'Geeso motioned them to a halt. He pursed his lips, gave a liquid, warbling bird call. Helene took advantage of the pause to rest. Her pet monkey moved playfully through the branches overhead.

Ki-Gor was intrigued by N'Geeso's action, but he asked no questions. The White Lord lounged against a tree, his

interest apparently focused on the erratic progress of a small, bright-green frog. He heard the almost imperceptible rustle which followed N'Geeso's signal, and abruptly realized how carefully the small chief had planned this foray.

Two bands of pygmies slid from the underbrush. They said nothing, but their broad grins adequately expressed their pleasure at Ki-Gor's presence. N'Geeso glanced innocently at the White Lord. The warrior's presence showed how confident the sly little chief had been that he could lure the jungle man to the hunt. Ki-Gor smiled inwardly, yet he realized if N'Geeso, with such an able force of hunters, still came to him for aid, then the quarry must be dangerous indeed.

He frowned, turned his gray eyes on Helene. As though reading his mind she tossed her head, emphatically declared: "I will not do it, Ki-Gor; I am going with you and I will not stay back here. You know there can't be any such monster. So don't be worrying about me."

"Wah," Ki-Gor said in mock fear. "I will match you against N'Geeso's devil-beast any day."

The White Lord's moment of doubt passed. The little man was merely plotting to draw him into a hunt before Tembu George's arrival. It was only a move to take the edge off Tembu George's visit.

The party moved forward again. Boko, like the pet he was, swung back and forth through the trees above them. He was enjoying the outing as much as a city dog taken on a walk through the park.

An increasingly strong gorilla scent assailed Ki-Gor's nostrils. The harsh male scent freshened as they went single file down the trail. N'Geeso was in the lead, with Ki-Gor second, Helene next and then the pygmy warriors strung out behind. Brilliant plumaged birds shrieked their protests at Boko's antics.

"He is just ahead," N'Geeso whispered. "Then we hunt one of the tree people?" asked Ki-Gor, employing the native name for gorilla.

"Aaaiieeee, Ki-Gor, my words are truth. This is a devil-beast such as you have never seen. Believe me, though his scent is that of the tree folk, he is a dreadful giant of evil."

At this point, Boko, bored by his com-

panions' slow ground travel, frisked far ahead out of sight. Emboldened by the presence of his friends, the man-things, Boko ranged with reckless abandon. But shortly after he disappeared, Boko shrieked piercingly, his voice almost human in its terror. He came hurtling back, threw himself into Helene's arms, shaking with fright.

Helene attempted to quiet Boko, but as they followed N'Geeso in the direction from which the monkey had fled, the little fellow's terror increased. Finally, he could stand it no longer, and tearing himself from Helene's arms, he sped back down the trail.

KI-GOR was puzzled by the pet's action, realizing no ordinary jungle sight could so frighten Boko. Urged by inner instinct, the White Lord tested his bow, held it ready. Now the gorilla scent was everywhere. He felt the short hairs along the back of his neck bristle, felt his muscles tense. Yet his mind still found no explanation for these instinctive reactions.

The trail opened into a sunlit clearing. Waist-high kunai grass rippled in the faint wind. Silence pressed over the clearing. No sign of life stirred on the open land. Not a single bird call broke the eerie quiet. Even the staccato calls of the tree toads were hushed. Yet, beneath this apparent peace was the electric feel of danger.

Though no word was spoken, the pygmies paused at the edge of the clearing. For the first time in his memory, Ki-Gor noted apprehension among the bold little hunters. This was the devil-beast's lair, and somewhere in the still forest about the clearing lurked the monster.

Then the thing they waited for came. Terrible, earth-shaking, the creature's shattering challenge sounded. The faint breeze eddying over the kunai grass had carried their scent to him. The blasting noise was an angry, rolling crash of thunder. Timber snapped and broke under the impact of tremendous weight.

The great beast moved to meet them. The hunted came to face its hunters. This was no frightened quarry, fearful of man and his weapons.

Ki-Gor stared across at the line of trees. He saw a stand of saplings shiver, then sway back before an immense weight. A mammoth creature smashed his way from

the forest, stood clearly revealed in the sunlit clearing.

An involuntary scream broke from Helene's lips. After a first gasp of alarm, the pygmies froze in their tracks. Even Ki-Gor stared at the gargantuan creature in disbelief, unable to trust his own eyes. The monster stood upright, drummed on his vast chest with mounting fury. He showed many gorilla characteristics, both in looks and actions. But in his tremendous stature, his vast breadth of chest, there was something unnatural, misshapen.

Never had Ki-Gor seen such dreadful fury as the beast exhibited. A burning madness possessed him. Studying the beast, Ki-Gor's keen eyes discovered an answer. Embedded deep in the monster's shoulder were two arrows, the blood still ebbed from the raw, torn flesh. No wonder the creature raged at the sight of men; he knew by bitter experience men were his enemies and in his raging strength he thirsted for vengeance.

The monster screamed his hate to the heavens. He drummed his chest, ripped and tore at the underbrush. Then, with a landslide's fearful irresistible momentum, he lunged to the attack. The earth shook under the blasting drive of his feet. It was incredible so huge and awkward a creature could move so fast. A moan went up from the pygmies, and except for N'Geeso, they were paralyzed. Ki-Gor watched the racing monster, knew in that moment poisoned darts could never halt that bulk of bone and muscle in time. There was just cause for the pygmies' despair, for they also had realized the truth too late.

The White Lord of the Jungle recognized in that instant the lives of all of them depended on his actions. He alone could stop the insane killer. And yet the festering arrows buried in the beast's shoulder showed how puny even were his weapons.

But not without reason was the White Lord's name a legend in the jungle. Ki-Gor stood without a tremor as death raced toward him. Steel-nerved, he swept an arrow from his quiver, fitted it to his great bow. He aimed as coolly and deliberately as a machine which knows no feeling.

The muscles of his back and arms writhed like snakes as he drew the bow. Then the long arrow flashed in the sun-

light, hissed as it cleft the air in hurtling flight. It struck true to its mark. Pain and hurt were abruptly in the monster's maddened screams.

THE ponderous beast slowed, swerved sideways. He raised one hand to claw at his face, tear at the arrow which lay embedded in his eye socket. N'Geeso stabbed three poisoned darts into the hairy bulk. A pygmy, believing Ki-Gor had permanently halted the beast, had dealt a fatal wound, gave an exultant shriek.

But the mountainous creature was far from death. His vast network of bone and muscle would not die easily. The pygmy's cry made him swing his good eye on the group. His slow mind linked the tearing pain in his head with the humans. He roared his hate, heaved forward to rip the man-things to bits.

With the beast almost upon them, this time the pygmies broke and ran. Only N'Geeso held firm, stabbing poisoned darts into the thick hide. And the White Lord of the Jungle stood unwavering, never moving his gaze from the beast's good eye. As the monster thundered down on him, he drew his bowstring back to the furthest point. Its sharp, clear twang went unheard as the jungle's deadliest marksman drove his second arrow into the devil-beast's remaining eye.

Ki-Gor had achieved his purpose. He had blinded the giant. He watched the mountainous creature reel blindly, drunkenly, off course, crashing into the wall of trees to his right.

The mammoth animal flailed and clawed the matted underbrush, destroying everything that came in reach. Even blinded he was still terrible in his power.

Ki-Gor had judged the giant well. He knew the best placed arrows could not bring sudden death to the devil-beast. Realizing he could not stop the charge, he took the only course open. He made the giant helpless by blinding him.

"Darts! Darts!" Ki-Gor commanded, his stern voice jerking the pygmy warriors back to their senses. The little men ranged themselves about the ravening animal. Their poisoned barbs pelted into his tough skin. His mad exertions, his fruitless rushes served to pump the poison rapidly through his body. The pygmies danced back and

forth eluding the giant's ever-more sluggish rushes. Then, with almost stunning abruptness, the monster staggered and fell. Quickly he was dead.

A triumphant cry went up from the pygmies. N'Geeso was beside himself with joy. He leaped about in happiness. But Ki-Gor showed little elation, turning instead to reassure himself that Helene was all right. She stood, wide-eyed, and solemn, regarding the miraculous deed her great mate had wrought.

"I thought it was the end," she confessed. "Where could that—that thing have come from?"

"Wah," Ki-Gor exclaimed. "Truly it is a puzzle." He frowned, thinking of the beast's destructive power. "There is work for N'Geeso, Tembu George and me. We must learn more about this mad one. We must search out his story."

They walked nearer the huge carcass. Ki-Gor's careful eyes studied the body. It was the figure of a gorilla, but strangely huge.

"Maybe he's a freak," suggested Helene. "Something is so unnatural, so distorted about him."

N'Geeso and his men, however, were little concerned with the devil-beast's origin. They were drunk with delight at having shared in such a kill. They wrangled excitedly about the best method to take the skin, for they were laying plans even now to parade this trophy through a score of villages.

"Aaaaaieee," cried N'Geeso, reaching high to tap Ki-Gor on the chest. "Will not Tembu George's eyes pop when he sees this. Never again will he dare raise his voice to boast of his puny hunts." N'Geeso chortled in glee, "And those foolish Masai warriors will see what it means to have a chief who can lead his men to a real kill."

Ki-Gor nodded his head sagely, agreeing with every word. Then he pointed to the wound in the creature's shoulder. The feathered tips of two arrows protruded from the flesh. Even under their crust of dried blood, the distinctive mark of the arrows were clearly discernible. Those tribal markings were known to every native.

"The Masai won't be too surprised when you tell them your story," Ki-Gor softly pointed out. "Those arrows show they have already seen him."

"N'Geeso's face fell. He was speechless for a moment, thunderstruck to think his carefully laid plan had been smashed by Tembu George's meddling warriors. Then, as he began to think clearly, he brightened again.

"Ho, it is so much better," he stated. "Where they failed, I have succeeded."

His buoyant spirits once more soaring, the pygmy chief turned away to loudly direct the devil-beast's skinning. Helene and Ki-Gor exchanged mirthful glances, but they said nothing. It was N'Geeso's hour of victory, and amused by the little man's anxiety to outdo his rival, the jungle couple made no mention of the chief actor's part in the kill.

BUT though Ki-Gor smiled, the puzzle of the giant beast bore on his mind. He was anxious to learn more about the creature, learn how it came here, where it came from. So much did the subject absorb him, that he let drop his original aim to investigate the white hunter's presence. He decided to return to Silver River and immediately upon Tembu George's arrival set out with the Masai chieftain to back-track the devil-beast.

Back at their camp the next day, the jungle couple directed preparations for Tembu George's visit. The pygmy hunters helped lay in a stock of game and fruits. Alone of all the pygmies, N'Geeso was of little help. Yet he was most anxious of all for Tembu George to arrive. The pygmy chief squatted by the fire, rocked happily on his heels, embroidered over and over to himself an ever more detailed tale of the devil-beast with which to amaze the Masai leader.

Nightfall came without any sign of the Masai. In the morning, feeling certain the big fighting men must arrive soon, everyone was astir at dawn. As the hours passed uneventfully, the camp grew more watchful.

It was mid-morning when Ki-Gor abruptly straightened, stood listening. All eyes focused on his intent face, "One man comes," the White Lord said at length.

"Tembu George runs ahead," suggested Helene.

"It is so," N'Geeso quickly agreed.

But Ki-Gor said nothing. He listened to the almost inaudible sound made by the

running man. It was not like Tembu George to outdistance his men and Ki-Gor knew this. Then minutes later, a tall, muscled Masai warrior raced into view. His body glistened with sweat. His breath came in the heavy, uneven gasps of a man who has overtaxed his strength. But though the Masai was obviously exhausted, he held himself proudly, stiffly erect.

The warrior paid no attention to the cry of welcome which greeted him. He brushed through the line of pygmies that moved to meet him, went straight to Ki-Gor. His face was strangely wooden. He stood silently for seconds staring at Ki-Gor, his tired mind groping for words.

Ki-Gor sensed something was wrong, badly wrong. "Speak, Bagodu!" the White Lord said swiftly. "What is it?" Concern was in his face as he reached a friendly hand to the warrior's shoulder.

Words came to the warrior then. He spoke in a voice harsh with sorrow and fatigue, spoke through lips which twisted with the pain of what he must say:

"The Masai need you, O Ki-Gor! Tembu George lies dying!"

IV

THE clearing was suddenly so still the wind's faint whisper in the upper trees was clearly heard. The pygmies fell to shocked silence. Helene looked unbelievably at Bagodu for a moment, then her face paled and she caught her breath.

The White Lord of the Jungle did not move, did not speak for a timeless interval. His face froze in hard set lines of self-control. Then cold and quick, his voice leaped out.

"Tembu George's killers will not live to gloat," he promised grimly, concluding the Masai chieftain was fatally wounded by some jungle renegade band. "Who did this thing?"

"No, Ki-Gor, it was a hunting accident," Bagodu said. "We found him unconscious, cut and bruised as though he had fought an animal with his hands. He was hurt, but with a little care, we thought he would easily recover."

The huge Masai paused, hardly able to speak of the matter. Tembu George was adored by his warriors and Bagodu was stunned by the swift turn of events.

"The Wasuli village was near," he continued. "We took Tembu George there and the Wasuli King gave us every help. But Tembu George immediately grew worse." Helplessly the warrior concluded: "He is dying and we can do nothing. His skin is like fire and his muscles hardened into steel knots."

N'Geeso had pushed his way to Ki-Gor's side. He stood frowning, his eyes soft with sorrow. When he spoke, he spoke as if Tembu George already were dead.

"It is the Fever of the Black Water," he said quietly. "The very ground of the Wasuli area is sick with it. If his muscles knot hard and his body sweat, then it is the Fever, not his wounds."

Bagodu nodded in despair, "Kalida, the new Wasuli King said it was the sickness."

Ki-Gor had heard tales of the strange sickness, of the swift deadliness with which it acted. Many Wasuli had died with it in the last few moons. Even friendly, peace-loving old King N'hya-Nyag was struck down with the Fever. The new king, Kalido, was the former ruler's cousin.

"I go at once!" Ki-Gor told Bagodu. "He must not die!"

Ki-Gor glanced at Helene. Knowing the pain in his heart, she said nothing. But when he trotted from the clearing, she ran at his side. Tembu George was also her friend. And unnoticed in the confusion, Boko, Helene's pet scampered to follow his mistress.

"We follow," cried N'Geeso, as the jungle couple swung into the tree routes, sped toward the east.

Ki-Gor's mind was in turmoil. A world as bright an hour before, was suddenly darkened. Tembu George's loss would leave a void in Ki-Gor's life. In addition, the mighty Masai chieftain was an influence for good in the jungle second only to Ki-Gor. With his steady influence gone, a score of old feuds might well revive.

The war-like Masai, once the scourge of the Congo, now worked with Ki-Gor to maintain peace, avoid senseless bloodshed. With Tembu George dead, a weaker, less dominant leader might be unable to hold in check Africa's most dreaded warriors.

And the method in which Tembu George was injured puzzled Ki-Gor. It was unlike the skilled warrior to be taken unawares

by man or beast. While such thoughts turned endlessly in his mind, the White Lord and his mate sped through the green twilight of the trees.

Neither the great-muscled White Lord nor his slim, lithe mate spoke as they drove tirelessly toward the Wasuli village. There was none of the usual joy in their graceful, swinging flight. The exchange of playful jibes, the leisurely side-explorations, were forgotten. This was a grimly serious race with death. Ki-Gor was ever urged to greater speed by the thought he might help save Tembu George if he could arrive in time.

ENTERING the Wasuli hunting grounds, he wondered at the signal drums' silence. It was odd that the jungle telegraph lay unused. Ordinarily, the great drum would be spelling out Tembu George's progress, and the message would be picked up by distant villages to be relayed in an ever-widening circle through the Congo. The Masai chieftain's fate was a matter of deep interest to countless tribes, whether friendly or enemy peoples.

Then when the Wasuli were so close he could smell the smoke of their campfires, the great drum spoke. It spoke with the clear, swift breaks that an accomplished drummer sending a vital message imparts. Heavy and ominous the drum beat sounded.

Ki-Gor slowed and stopped as the great drum's notes smote the air. He listened and his face was graven stone. He listened and his broad shoulders sagged, his long steel-fingered hands knotted into fists.

Helene could not read the drum talk, but this once she did not need to understand the rapid beat. She looked at her silent, motionless mate, and understood. Boko came near her, chattered curiously at her stillness, but she gave him no notice.

Tembu George was dead!

The giant black man, with his quick smile and his deep, joyful voice, was gone. The huge warrior who would have led his men against the devil's own legions at Ki-Gor's bidding was no more. The tall, straight American Negro who had won leadership of the Masai through his wisdom and strength of arms never again would cry out a happy greeting to Ki-Gor and Helene.

Minutes passed before Ki-Gor stirred again. Then with careful, deliberate movements, he descended to the ground. When Helene joined him, he led her toward the village. Boko, upset by the strange actions of his masters, followed disconsolately.

The death drum still maintained its rhythmic beat when they entered the village. Ki-Gor halted at the entrance, stared at the unfamiliar cluster of huts. He seldom visited the Wasuli. Their record was not one to inspire the White Lord's trust or friendship. They were lazy, treacherous people, forever in search of easy spoils.

King N'hya - Nyag, whose reign had lasted only three years, had kept the Wasuli in bounds, and was beginning to gain the good-will of neighboring tribes when he suddenly died of the Fever. Ki-Gor was not acquainted with Kalido, the new ruler, who had assumed the throne two moons before.

Men and women stood about in small groups. There was an air of uneasiness in the village. In each person's mind was the thought that perhaps he might be the next victim. Then, too, it was not good that a Masai chieftain should die in their village.

In some unaccountable way, the fierce Masai might attach Tembu George's death to them. The Wasuli, warriors and women alike, wished above all else not to antagonize the Masai fighting men. Ki-Gor sensed this tension, knew its origin.

Suddenly, a keen-eyed woman saw Ki-Gor and his red-haired mate. The low-voiced murmur of conversation fell away. All eyes focused on Ki-Gor. How would the White Lord of the Jungle take his friend's death?

Then a heavy-shouldered, powerfully-built man well above average height strode through the silent natives. His carriage, his step easily identified him as a strong man, both in body and mind. He raised his right hand as he approached the jungle couple. His bright, quick eyes never wavered from the White Lord's face.

"I greet you in sorrow, Oh Ki-Gor," the big man said in deep, even tones. "Excuse the rude silence of my people. They are embarrassed that your visit is an occasion of sadness."

So this was Kalido? Even in this moment, Ki-Gor could not help comparing

the assured speech, the confident manner of this man with his predecessor's shambling, uncertain actions.

"Though the time of our first meeting is bad, the fault is not yours. You have my thanks, Kalido, for helping my friend." Ki-Gor paused, his eyes searching for a sign of the Masai. "Now—if you will show me where my friend lies."

Kalido regarded the White Lord a moment longer, then, with slow, measured step, led the way. In the center of the village, Ki-Gor saw the tall Masai standing stiffly about a hut. Their stone faces revealed nothing, but their eyes mirrored their anguish.

O'gaahni, scarred by many battles, stood at the door of the hut. In the war-like Masai order, the command now passed to him. Helene and Kalido stood back, as Ki-Gor approached the chieftain.

Ki-Gor's arm went to the straight-backed warrior's shoulder, "The drums say a friend is gone," the White Lord said simply. "My heart says the sun is gone."

"It is so, Oh Ki-Gor," O'gaahni replied hoarsely. "It is good you are here. We are lost."

"I would sit with my friend," Ki-Gor said, indicating his desire to be alone with Tembu George.

O'gaahni hesitated, his tongue could not find the words to deny Ki-Gor. But Kalido was quickly at Ki-Gor's side.

"O'gaahni has not the heart to bar you," the Wasuli King said in a low, serious voice, "but it is dangerous. The Fever stays long with the body. I beg you not to endanger your own life. Tembu George would understand."

The White Lord's jaw set hard. "I would be less than a man to let fear hold me out."

O'GAAHNI'S hard face softened at the White Lord's declaration. It was not good to keep a man's friends from his side at such a time. Native custom required it, even though Kalido warned of the great danger. Seeing his words had no effect, Kalido glanced at Helene, but found no support there. He nodded in understanding, stepped back.

O'gaahni pulled aside the rush netting which closed the doorway. Bending low to clear the sill, the Jungle Lord stepped

into the hut's dim interior. Helene took a quick breath, followed him. The netting closed behind them. . . .

Later the Masai asked Ki-Gor to council with them. They sought his advice as to Tembu George's burial. In the jungle, burial rites must be held quickly.

Realizing it was impossible to return Tembu George to his people, O'gaahni and his fellows were concerned as to the proper move. The Wasuli were not held in high esteem by their tribe. Yet Kalido had extended them every courtesy and now he told the Masai his tribe would be honored to accord the dead man the full ceremony due a great chieftain. Not only would it be an affront to the Wasuli to refuse, but there was no other nearby place where adequate honor could be given.

Ki-Gor understood the cause of their worry. He took the problem as his own, considered it carefully. After a long while, he spoke.

"Accept the Wasuli offer," Ki-Gor advised. "The Wasuli will regard your decision as a favor granted."

O'gaahni glanced at the faces of his men, saw their assent. He stood up.

"It is proper," he said. "Kalido has been more than good to us. Perhaps the Wasuli will take a new path with their new king. It is unjust to hold old grudges against them."

Kalido acted swiftly when the Masai told him they were pleased to accept his offer. He transformed the village into a beehive of activity. The women hurried to set great fires, prepare the traditional burial feast. The warriors oiled their bodies, daubed themselves with the blue and white designs of mourning. The chief witchdoctor and his assistants, in their fearsome masks, stood vigil around Tembu George, shrilling incantations. With their rattling gourds and chanting, they formed a protecting barrier to ward off the evil spirits which the natives believe gather around the newly dead.

But the dark, sullen river which flowed near the Wasuli village was the scene of greatest activity. The River Without Sound, the natives called it. Its dark, oily waters flowed with infinite slowness past the village to disappear into the black, dead Swamp of Mists. From time immemorial

the Wasuli had floated their dead down the river, the mourners halting their canoes when the swamp mists reached out to receive the burial canoe.

The Wasuli spoke of the swamp in hushed voices. No native ever set foot there. It was an unknown, mysterious place given over to the spirits of the departed. The natives believed no man could enter the rolling mists and emerge alive.

And now, on the river bank, the Wasuli busied themselves decorating their war canoes with wreaths of blue and white flowers. Special pains were taken with the canoe which would carry Tembu George's body.

A couch of fragrant grasses was laid in the canoe, covered with lion skins. Fresh food and water were placed by the bier. Gifts were put in the boat's prow and a supply of weapons laid near the couch. With practiced hands, the Wasuli rigged floats on either side of the boat, cleverly fashioned to balance the canoe and hold it steady on its course. From each float a line was extended back to a following canoe, this giving added control over the burial boat's course.

THEN, when all was in readiness, the death drum spoke. In two long files, the chanting Wasuli approached the hut where Tembu George lay. The tall, stern-faced Masai walked in the fore of the procession, followed by Helene and the White Lord. Before the hut they halted.

With solemn ceremony, Tembu George was lifted on the joined shields of four specially selected warriors. Raising the departed chieftain's body high, they walked slowly down the lane formed by the Wasuli. The great drum's rolling beat spoke out over the forest, and on distant trails, in far-off villages men paused, knowing that a mighty leader went on his last march.

Through the village went the procession, past the open gate, and down the trail to the river. The long singing files grew now as the women and children fell in behind the warriors. Their lamenting voices took on a strange, unreal quality as they entered the jungle. The giant trees, the tangled creepers and thrusting walls of bramble caught the Wasuli dirge, muffled it, threw back no echo.

It was all a bad dream to Ki-Gor.

Fatalist though he was, even at this moment, Ki-Gor could not grasp the fact of Tembu George's death. He had seen many men die, had been near death himself countless times, but he was unprepared for this. Time and again his mind told him: "It cannot be." But when his eyes rested on the upraised shields, he knew the grim truth.

He took his place with Helene in one of the lead canoes. Kalido sat at a special place in the prow. Tembu George lay alone in the long, carved war canoe which was his bier.

At Kalido's signal, two Wasuli waded out and urged the decorated canoe into the slow current. The other boats cast off, and in utter silence, for the chanting had ceased, the double row of watercraft began to move.

The funeral canoe hardly required use of the guide lines attached to its steadying floats. As though drawn by a magnet, it slid gently downstream, headed for the Swamp of the Mists.

Except for the purl of water against the boats, the breathing of the paddlers as they kept the loaded canoes together, the quiet continued unbroken for long minutes. Then a Wasuli in each canoe lifted a hand drum to his lap, smote it in a sharp, quick cadence, and far back the White Lord heard the witchdoctor lift his voice in a high, wavering sing-song.

Though the river appeared as sluggish as ever, the canoes now moved more swiftly, eagerly nosed through the dark water. Ki-Gor gave an involuntary shiver. The air was abruptly damp, heavy with the odor of stagnant pools, rotting vegetation. Along the banks the bright green foliage was replaced by ragged, yellow-mottled underbrush and the huge trees took on a dead look, their bark blackened, their limbs thick with curtains of moss. There was no life, no movement anywhere as the mourning party swept close to the great swamp.

Ki-Gor was shaken from his oppressive thoughts by Helene's voice beside him: "Look, Ki-Gor, the mists!" And ahead of them he saw white folds of vapor shimmer and twist and curl over the river.

He felt the boat surge under him, gain speed as it swept toward the swamp. He wanted to cry out for the procession to

stop. He wanted to shout that this evil, unclean haunt was no proper resting place for a Masai chieftain, for his friend. As this thought struck him, Kalido leaned forward, knife in hand, and with one quick slash cut the guide rope which bound them to Tembu George. In the other lead boat, another native simultaneously severed the other rope. Then paddles bit deep, brought the two lines of following craft almost to a standstill.

The funeral canoe drove toward the mists alone. Sunlight shone on the blue flowers, gleamed on the weapons, illuminated the massive black man who lay in the canoe. Then the sunlight was gone and the first fingers of mist curled over the boat's prow. The white folds fell thicker and suddenly the craft was blotted out.

KI-GOR sat staring at the water during the entire trip back to the village. His every instinct urged him to get away as soon as possible, lose himself and his grief in the jungle. He had no stomach for the ceremonies still to come. Like a creature of the wild, he wanted the companionship at this time of no one but his mate. Yet he knew he must not leave. Native custom demanded that he stay in the village until morning.

Helene understood the bronzed giant's mood. She knew the emotions that surged through this jungle-reared man, the distaste he felt for the feasting and dancing which were part of the rites to be endured. But as they took their place in the central compound, the couple's composed demeanor betrayed no inkling of their thoughts to the Wasuli.

The fires leaped up as the swift dusk came. The distant rumble of a lion was drowned out by the abrupt start of the drums. A muscled warrior armed with spear and shield, his body daubed with white markings, moved lithely toward the bank of drummers. He sprang high, brandishing the spear, and then with a leopard's grace began the symbolic Dance to the Dead.

The White Lord at first watched the whirling, posturing figure indifferently. Then his gray eyes sharpened with interest as he recognized the dancer. It was Kalido, King of the Wasuli, rendering this

final honor himself to Tembu George. The big man made an impressive figure in the shifting firelight as he moved skillfully through the barbaric ritual.

"By dancing, he pays a very great tribute to the Masai, doesn't he, Ki-Gor?" asked Helene.

The White Lord nodded in answer, his gaze following Kalido's gyrations. At length he said softly, "He is a strange—an unusual man." And in Ki-Gor's voice was neither approval nor disapproval.

Helene glanced questioningly at Ki-Gor. She lacked her mate's keen insight into native character, a knowledge gained only through years of contact with the black men.

"He is a strong man, the first strong leader the Wasuli have had in many years," Ki-Gor told her. "He can do a great deal of good—or make the Wasuli worse than they have ever been."

"Well, he has made a good beginning today," said Helene. "I know the trouble you have had with this tribe. Maybe Kalido can lead them straight."

"That is my hope," declared the White Lord.

Two women shyly approached the jungle couple now, placed gourds filled with food before them. It was a rich feast with many kinds of meat and fish, a variety of fruits and vegetables, and quantities of native beer. The women brought gourds of cool spring water instead of the harsh brew to Ki-Gor and Helene, still another evidence of how carefully Kalido catered to the likes of his guests.

The White Lord and his mate both pretended to partake of the food, but it was play acting for they were entirely without hunger. After the long, strenuous day, however, Helene was thirsty. She thought first of Ki-Gor and reached for his drink, urged him to take a few swallows at least. He shook his head as she proffered the gourd, so with a worried sigh, Helene tipped up the container, drank deeply.

The feasting and dancing continued late into the night. The jungle couple were joined from time to time by the Masai or Kalido, and it was a long while before they were able to seek the quiet of the hut assigned them. Even then, despite their utter weariness, sleep did not come easily.

Counter to her usual habit, Helene was awake the next morning long before Ki-Gor. The earth was gray with the first light, and the village was damp and cool with the mists which had rolled in from the river during the night. Helene shivered in the unaccustomed dampness when she first awakened, but soon she felt hot and feverish. Then the chill returned.

She lay quiet until Ki-Gor awakened. Not wishing to worry him and delay their departure, she said nothing, though she felt ever more miserable.

"I want to go home, Ki-Gor," she told him. "Let's not stay here even for the morning meal."

Ki-Gor ran his hand through her soft hair, caressed her gently. "I want to go, too," he said. "But N'Geeso should arrive by evening. He will feel badly at having missed the ceremony. Perhaps we should wait for him."

Helene bit her lip. There were fine beads of perspiration on her forehead, around her mouth. She smiled at her mate, said in her most winning voice, "Please. Let's go now."

He quickly gave in.

"Let us go pay our respects to Kalido and we will leave."

Ki-Gor did not notice that Helene waited for him to walk ahead, that she deliberately lagged behind. She kept back of him to conceal her unsteadiness. The ground seemed to roll beneath her feet, the village weaved and shifted before her eyes. She got through the farewells to the Masai warriors all right, but her face was white and set as they approached Kalido.

THE Wasuli king apparently had been awake for some time. He had eaten heartily according to the empty vessels around him. He was absorbed in thought, so much so that he did not hear the jungle couple until they stood before him.

He stared blankly at them for a moment, then came out of his reverie with a start. His eyes widened and his mouth half opened. But quickly he was himself, apologizing for day-dreaming.

"One travels a long trail quickly in his thoughts," he said smiling, "and I was far away when you approached."

Kalido studied the White Lord curiously. "Is there something I can do?" he asked.

"Already you have done much," Ki-Gor answered. "We come to thank you."

"But you do not mean to leave," protested Kalido, breaking in on Ki-Gor. "I had hoped you would stay a few days." He paused. "But I think only of myself. Let me walk to the gate with you."

As they turned to walk toward the gate, Helene stumbled. Ki-Gor's steadying hand was on her arm in an instant. He paid little attention to the incident, assuming she had slipped on a rock. But Kalido's sharp eyes flicked over her taut features and he frowned.

They were almost to the gate when Helene stumbled again, and this time, despite Ki-Gor's aid, she sagged to her knees. The White Lord looked at her in growing alarm. Her eyes were closed, all color drained from her face, and her body was rigid against his arm. He lifted her up, held her tightly, his gray eyes confused and alarmed. Automatically, he turned and strode through the village to the hut they had left earlier.

Ki-Gor placed his slim mate on the sleeping mat, knelt beside her. He was familiar with many jungle maladies and their treatment, but this was something new to him and he was lost. Bewildered, he turned to Kalido, who stood close behind.

"What is it?" he asked desperately. "What can we do?"

The Wasuli king moved nervously. His eyes avoided Ki-Gor's distressed gaze. He cleared his throat. But at last he had to speak.

"It is the sickness brought by the mists," he said fearfully. "It is the Fever of the Black Water."

Then, for the only time that any man could remember, there were hot tears in Ki-Gor's eyes. It was the death that had taken Tembu George. Now it was taking Helene, taking her as he watched, and with all his jungle knowledge, with all his skill, strength and courage, he was helpless to save her.

V

KALIDO watched the White Lord's seething torment as he learned Helene was dying, waited while the white giant bent frantically over the scarcely breathing girl. Then the Wasuli leader

moved quietly to the door, stood there so he could be out of the hut in one leap. He had seen many struck down with the sickness. It was clear to him that after a few more breaths Helene would be gone. Kalido was apprehensive about how Ki-Gor would react.

Ki-Gor's devotion to his wife was a jungle legend. At the least threat of harm to Helene, he had been known to turn from a calm, even-tempered man into a raging, relentless battler. In losing her now, might not the primitive giant in insane grief connect the Wasuli with his tragedy, turn in all his terrible strength and madness on those about him? Kalido thought of this and was fearful.

But Kalido's fears were in vain. When it happened, when the White Lord realized Helene was gone, he did nothing. He did not move or speak. It was as though in that moment his body had changed to stone.

The Wasuli leader stared at the great-shouldered white man crouched there by his still mate. He was stunned by the terrible mute sorrow apparent in every line of that powerful body. This was not the reaction he had expected. Quietly, he backed away from the scene, edged his way from the hut.

Word that something was amiss with Helene had spread. Villagers saw her fall. Now a curious, muttering crowd was gathered about the hut. When Kalido turned to face them, they saw in his expression the truth, and a low moan of anguish sprang simultaneously from many throats. But from sorrow at Ki-Gor's misfortune, the thoughts of the Wasuli quickly changed to how the muscled giant would take this second blow.

"Aaaaaa," one said hoarsely, "I have seen him mad with battle. He will blame us. He will slay us all."

Another listened fearfully, the whites of his eyes showing as he remembered seeing the White Lord single-handedly smash and disperse a band of slavers.

"Nabunge speaks rightly. He will want to kill. He will be like a wounded lion, mad with the lust for blood."

Nervously, natives detached themselves from the group, began to scatter from before the doorway. Kalido, withdrawn into himself, seemed not to notice at first.

Then he roused himself, saw what occurred.

"Dangos!" he exclaimed in a low, yet stinging voice. "Ki-Gor will harm no one. He squats motionless by his mate, not even thinking of you."

Their king's words quieted them, but the natives continued to give the hut a wide berth. Through the long hours of the day, no one approached Ki-Gor, but still he did not show himself, did not so much as speak a word. Then as the evening deepened, Kalido parted the matting over the door, called softly to the White Lord. He hesitated awkwardly when there was no answer, then retreated.

O'gaahni, waiting nearby, as he had throughout the day, glanced with troubled eyes at Kalido.

"It is bad he should sit so," he muttered. "First, Tembu George, and now, Helene. It is too much for him."

Moonlight silvered the thatched hut before O'gaahni rose from his post. A long while he stood thinking before he went in to Ki-Gor. He spoke then as an old friend, his harsh voice soft with emotion, speaking as a father to a son who has been injured deeply.

But O'gaahni's words were as nothing. The giant dimly outlined in the darkness, neither saw nor heard the Masai. Except for the faint sound of his breathing, the great figure could have been a graven image. O'gaahni turned away at last, bewildered and a little frightened, leaving Ki-Gor alone.

The Masai warrior went with slow steps to the central campfire. As he arrived there, voices sounded at the gate, and when the barriers swung open, a group of men trotted wearily into the firelight. After hearing the death drum tell of Helene, N'Geeso had led his men, despite their fears of the devil-crowded night, along the dim trails to the village.

There was no banter on the little man's tongue this time. His face was a tight, hard mask as he curbed his emotions, squatted beside O'gaahni to hear the tragic story in detail. When he heard Ki-Gor's reaction, he shook his head. Better than anyone else, he understood the White Lord.

"It will do no good to try again tonight," N'Geeso said. "In the morning, I will go in and talk to him."

PREPARATION for the ceremonies were completed in the village the next morning before the pygmy chieftain went to talk with Ki-Gor. Representatives of other tribes arrived and soon absorbed the uneasiness of the Wasuli as they waited to see whether N'Geeso could approach the White Lord. The pygmy was a long time in the hut, his low voice barely audible outside the walls. But as Ki-Gor's oldest and most trusted friend he succeeded where the others had failed.

Ki-Gor followed N'Geeso from the hut. The White Lord's face was gaunt with fatigue and sorrow. There was a queer, blank look in his eyes. He stared straight before him, evidencing no recognition of anyone. Though death is commonplace in the jungle, Ki-Gor somehow had never considered the possibility of Helene's death, and the shock of its coming so soon after Tembu George's loss struck him with fearful impact.

In his stunned state, the white giant stood silently by N'Geeso, allowed the Wasuli to begin the ceremonies without voicing a word. The whole thing seemed a dream to Ki-Gor. It was something unreal, a dimly grasped event without meaning or significance.

Ki-Gor walked beside his friend as the procession wound through the village, down the path in the forest to the river bank. He moved like an automaton, awkwardly taking his place in one of the lead canoes. He stared unseeingly at the decorated boat which held his mate. N'Geeso, his small shoulders bowed under the rapid events of the past few days, sat quietly beside him.

At this moment, a suppressed murmur ran along the bank. Men made quick, grabbing motions, tried to corner an agile little form that darted determinedly toward Helene's boat. Boko, the red-haired girl's pet monkey, had followed the procession through the trees and now was racing to reach the still form of his mistress. A group of men barred him from the boat, but the quick-witted monkey did an about-face, sped to Ki-Gor's boat. With a leap, he reached Ki-Gor's shoulder, grimaced at his pursuers, and was away again racing like a tight-rope walker over the guide line which led to Helene's canoe.

Ki-Gor blinked his eyes, and watching

the monkey, he frowned. He turned like a man roused from deep sleep to look at N'Geeso. His frown deepened, and he started to stand up. But as the pygmy's hand touched his arm, the White Lord settled back.

"It's her pet," N'Geeso told the Wasuli. "Leave him alone."

For the second time in three days, the boats slid through the heavy, black water. The frown remained on Ki-Gor's face. His glance did not once leave the canoe which glided smoothly, gracefully in the lead. Then as the river banks grew blackened and dead, the white mist began to shimmer and curl in the distance. The canoes moved faster, drove toward the beckoning mist.

Ki-Gor tensed as the gleaming knives slashed the guide lines. The canoes slowed, all but the one flower-covered craft which sped straight into the whiteness and was gone. No sound broke the oppressive silence until at Kalido's signal, paddles struck the water with soft splashes, turned the canoes, sent them gliding upstream.

The blackened, moss-hung trees fell behind. The yellow, mottled, struggling vines and underbrush gave way to healthy green foliage. Now for the first time Ki-Gor's glance lifted, turned from the river to the tree-lined banks. He watched the branches press close overhead as the canoe swept along the shore. Then, with a smooth, quick movement which took the entire party by surprise, the White Lord rose, grasped a low-hanging branch and swung out of the boat. He was gone with hardly a sound, melting into the jungle.

N'Geeso stared after his friend, his eyes troubled, but he did not try to call him back. He understood. Ki-Gor was reacting to his trouble not like a native, but an animal of the jungle. Unlike the average man, he wanted not sympathy and companionship, but only solitude in which to heal his wounds alone.

WHEN he first left the canoe, Ki-Gor threw himself through the trees with dizzy speed, trying, through physical exertion, to numb himself to the growing anguish he felt. He drove himself unmercifully, until at last he flung himself weary and panting beside a small stream. He drank the cool water greedily, realizing for the first time in many hours how great

was his thirst. After a brief rest, he began to travel on foot, moving toward no particular destination, merely keeping himself on the go.

When night fell, Ki-Gor sought the shelter of a tree, lay wide-eyed through the dark hours. He hardly heard the soft pad of night prowlers, the cough of a lion, the myriad familiar noises that crowded the jungle blackness. Gnawing hunger drove him to eat in the morning, but too listless to hunt, he only munched a few pieces of fruit near at hand.

That day and the next he drifted aimlessly through the forest. He kept ever to himself, avoiding the occasional bands of natives threading the trails. He was transformed into a surly jungle creature following secret, little-traveled ways, moving with cat-like stealth through shadowed fastnesses. Though he sought no goal, always he kept in motion, urged on by an inner restlessness he could not deny.

Red-eyed and disheveled, Ki-Gor came at last to a place that made him pause. He sniffed the dank air, his nostrils tightening at the heavy odor of rot and stagnant water. He looked down to find he stood deep in mud. His face puzzled, he noted his surroundings closely for the first time in hours. Great moss-hung trees, their blackened trunks mottled with fungus, lay all about him.

And all at once he knew where he was. Despite his effort to flee into the solitude of the jungle, to escape the memory of this place, his subconscious mind had guided him back to the Swamp of Mists. He looked down a bleak lane of trees and in the distance saw the restless white curtain of mist which marked the edge of the swamp. He felt desperately alone in this desolate, rotting waste, and realizing how utterly lacking in life the entire area was, an odd, nameless fear laid hold of him.

But still he stood in the unclean wetness, watching the mist's shimmering movement, feeling the painful silence thrust at his ear drums with mounting violence. He stood there wanting to leave, but somehow powerless to go. He watched the swaying whiteness until his eyes ached with strain.

And then, suddenly, he started. A dark form moved in the bare limbs of a tree before him! Or was it his imagination?

His muscles tensed until they were tight

with pain. He searched the leafless branches trying to locate the thing that crept over the wet bark. What kind of creature would seek this barren waste? Fragments of stories born of native superstition flashed through his mind. He gave an involuntary shudder. Did this furtive, shadowy being come from the Swamp of Mists?

Then he saw it again. The creature darted into view, was gone, and then moving ever nearer, it came in sight once more. Ki-Gor stared hard, and smiling grimly at himself, he relaxed. It was a monkey, a very muddy, very bedraggled monkey.

With the spell which had bound him now broken, Ki-Gor turned on his heel, began to pick his way toward dry ground. He wanted no more of this ugly bog. Yet before he took five steps, he stopped in his tracks. His mind was functioning normally for the first time in days, picking up the threads so abruptly snapped off in those terrible hours in the Wasuli village.

That monkey! The thought of it held him. He pressed his hand against his forehead, searched his mind for an answer that lay hidden there, and abruptly memory surged over him. The monkey was Boko, of course! Yet how could Boko be here when he swept into the mists in Helene's canoe?

Ki-Gor wheeled around, and his deep voice shattered the quiet as he called to the monkey.

Boko did not wait for the familiar voice to call him twice. With shrill, relieved cries, he raced along the branches, leaped into Ki-Gor's arms. He hugged the White Lord about the neck, chattering explosively in his delight.

After this display of affection, Boko made an unexpected, bewildering move. He tore himself loose from Ki-Gor's arms, leaped back into the tree, raced a few steps toward the mist. Then he stopped, looked back at the White Lord, muttered excitedly.

"Come, Boko, let's get out of this place," Ki-Gor said.

But the monkey only grew more upset, darting back to Ki-Gor, then starting toward the swamp. Puzzled, the jungle man watched the pet's antics a full minute before their significance dawned on him.

The White Lord pursed his lips in a low whistle of surprise.

Boko meant to lead him into the Swamp of Mists!

KI-GOR could not fathom the little animal's purpose. Perhaps in leaping from the canoe after it passed into the mists, Boko had discovered something that was a treasure in his eyes. Certainly, only a matter of supreme importance to his small mind would cause him to raise such a disturbance.

The swamp was distasteful to Ki-Gor, but in reverting to normal, his dread of the place was gone. He considered a minute, then shrugging his shoulders in surrender, he gave in to the pet. After all, what difference did it make where he went? If it would please Helene's beloved Boko, then he would indulge the creature.

The sure-footed jungle man picked his way cautiously over the dangerous ground, unwilling to risk attempting to follow Boko through the rotting trees. The branches would hold the monkey's slight weight, but supporting Ki-Gor's muscled bulk was another matter. It was slow, difficult progress, but the White Lord, growing steadily more intrigued with Boko's strange antics, worked his way to the edge of the mist.

He hesitated at this shifting barrier, realizing that in passing it he was breaking a native taboo. Then, with a deep breath, he plunged ahead, following the sound of Boko's voice. The fog thickened with his every step and Ki-Gor began to wonder how much further he could continue, began to doubt the wisdom of humoring the monkey's whim. Feeling his way along blindly, Ki-Gor's feet struck solid ground, no longer sank in sticky mud.

Abruptly, the mist thinned. A few steps further and the White Lord was free of the clinging fog. He walked faster now, noting that the ground continued to grow firmer. The blackened moss-choked trees gave way to living timber. Boko romped ahead through the branches, turning from time to time to make sure Ki-Gor still followed.

Ki-Gor abandoned the slow, tiresome foot travel, swung into the trees and moved forward at a faster pace. After a time he

came to the bank of a river, and studying its dark waters, he knew it was the same river that flowed past the Wasuli village. Following the bank, he watched the river broaden, grow more sluggish.

He was unprepared for the next scene that greeted him. A great lake opened before him, a vast expanse of water into which the River of Silence emptied. A bow-shot from where he stood was a large island, its trees and foliage brightly green in the sunlight. He studied the rim of beach and his eyes narrowed with interest. Canoe after canoe was drawn up on the beach.

He wondered at this secret of the Swamp of Mists for so many canoes were clear evidence that many natives lived on the island. Then after the first surprise of his discovery was past, he noted the craft more slowly. More than half of the canoes were decaying and broken. Half frowning, he glanced up and down the beach on which he stood, and was startled to find countless more of the native boats extending as far as the eye could see.

And now he understood. He had momentarily forgotten the purpose of this place. It was the graveyard of the Wasuli. These rotting canoes were eerie tombstones revealing the numberless natives who had floated down the silent river to their final rest. He glanced at the muddy lake waters, struck with the thought of how many craft must rest in the murky depths.

He found his eyes searching suddenly for a canoe still bright with decorations and he recoiled, realizing what he was doing, not wanting in his heart to find this particular one. He called softly to Boko, meaning to leave the lake, turn back to the land of living.

But against his will, he glanced once more at the island. He tensed and dropped to one knee behind a concealing bush. Across the water, two men strolled into view on the canoe-littered beach.

One man was white, an immaculately dressed, distinguished looking fellow. The other was a squat, thick-bodied black. Ki-Gor watched the odd pair stroll out of sight down the beach. Then the White Lord squatted in hiding a long time, watching for the appearance of other men. But there was no other sign of life. He debated

briefly with himself, then decided he could never rest if he left without learning the reason for the white man's presence in the Swamp of Mists.

KI-GOR rose and moved swiftly along the bank, his keen eyes flicking over the canoes lined along the way. The Wasuli make their craft well, so it was not long before he found one that would safely carry him. He noted the paddles remained in the boat, but all weapons, gifts and trinkets had disappeared.

The White Lord was armed only with a knife, but he anticipated no trouble. After all, the advantage of surprise would be his. Boko huddled in the bow as the jungle man sent the canoe skimming as fast as he dared, considering the degree of its seaworthiness. His skillful paddle bit the water without sound.

With one final thrust, he sent the canoe skidding through the shallow water to beach quietly in the soft mud. He picked up Boko, waded to dry ground and, releasing the monkey, set out to follow the pair he had seen from the mainland. He ran with the swift, gliding step of a person born to the jungle trails, his keen eyes keeping him easily on the track. He had no special plan in mind, meaning only to confront the two, ask them bluntly how they came to be in the Swamp and what they did there. This forbidden land was a strange place for a well-dressed white man, and stranger still for a native.

Ki-Gor heard the low sound of voices conversing in the Wasuli tongue. One voice was that of the white man, and listening, the White Lord marveled at the ease and fluency with which the fellow handled the awkward language. The men had turned and were now walking back toward him. The White Lord put Boko down, and stopping, waited in plain view for the odd pair. They came along soon, strolling unhurriedly, the native paying close attention to his master's words.

The black was the first to sense Ki-Gor's presence. He looked up startled, his eyes widening when he saw the tanned giant motionless in the path. He recoiled, jabbering a warning to his companion. The white man looked up now, but except for a faint arching of his eyebrows, he betrayed no emotion.

"Ho! I come without weapons," Ki-Gor declared, announcing his peaceful intentions through the traditional native greeting.

The smile formed slowly, almost deliberately, on the white man's face. He walked forward, extending his hand.

"You gave us a start here, friend," he said. "Visitors, as you can gather, are rather a rare thing in these parts."

Ki-Gor shook hands awkwardly, remembering not to grip his hand too hard in this unfamiliar greeting. He was aware, though apparently his full attention was focused on the white man, that the native watched him with hostile eyes.

"I'm sorry," Ki-Gor said. "I saw you walking along the beach and wondered what you did on this island. This land is taboo, you know. It might go hard with you if the Wasuli learned you entered the land of their dead."

With Ki-Gor's words, the man's strangely piercing gaze grew more intense.

"The Wasuli will not learn I'm here," he said crisply, "unless you tell them. I trust that will not happen."

Ki-Gor sensed a threat in the quick answer.

He did not seek trouble, but if this pair wanted it, it was a matter of indifference to him. He shifted his weight slightly, stood perfectly balanced to counter any hostile move.

"I asked why you were here," he said, "and I expect an answer." This time his voice rang coldly. "White men do not trample the beliefs and laws of the natives in this territory."

The white man sensed the abrupt shift in Ki-Gor's attitude. His glance flicked over the jungle man's superbly muscled body. Then he smiled, spread his arms in a sweeping gesture.

"Don't misunderstand me," he said. "I'm glad to tell you—rather show you—why I am here. You will see I have a good reason to be here. I'm not entirely an intruder. This has been my home for many years."

He broke off his conversation a moment to address the squat, muscular black who fidgeted restless beside him.

"Stop scowling, Malu! This man is our friend."

Malu nodded obediently, threw a thin

smile at Ki-Gor, but the obvious suspicion did not leave his ugly face.

"I'm a doctor—Doctor Ralph Devere," the man resumed. "It so happens this place is ideal for my important studies. But instead of trying to tell you, come to my laboratory and let me show you my experiments."

KI-GOR thawed under the doctor's flow of words. The man was so open about his work, so anxious to explain it that the White Lord felt perhaps he had been too abrupt. After all, he considered, he, too, was an intruder in the Swamp of Mists.

"I am Ki-Gor," the White Lord said simply as they began to walk along the path. "Hardly a hand of suns ago my mate was floated down the River of Silence. I could not stay long in such a place of sadness."

Mentioning Helene, Ki-Gor was reminded of her pet. He stopped, looked around for Boko. The monkey had disappeared, which was strange, for ordinarily he took a keen delight in inspecting new people. After repeated calls, Boko came reluctantly from his hiding place behind a bush. He made a wide circle around Dr. Devere and the native, darted nervously up to Ki-Gor.

Malu's hard eyes studied the bedraggled little monkey as intently as though it were the first one of its kind he had ever seen. Under the black's gaze, the pet began to tremble and leaped into the security of Ki-Gor's arms. The White Lord was puzzled by this behavior, because neither Devere nor the native had seen the monkey before, so there was no discernible reason for the creature to be afraid.

"So you are Ki-Gor," declared Devere, ignoring Boko's presence. "No wonder you came to investigate us. I've heard of your trouble with renegade whites who drift in here to victimize the natives. But I'm truly sorry to hear about your wife. Even in this remote place, I have heard tales of her beauty and goodness."

"It was the Fever of the Black Water," explained Ki-Gor painfully. "You are a doctor. Why don't you try to find a cure for this Fever. It seems to infect only the Wasuli region."

The doctor turned his piercing eyes on

Ki-Gor, hesitated before he spoke. For the first time, the White Lord noted that the impact of those black, unblinking eyes was like a physical blow. Devere's tone was low-pitched as though he confided a secret for the first time.

"I can cure the Fever!" He leaned close to the White Lord. "Don't you see, the Fever is one of the main reasons I am here. It is the basis of my studies. In learning to control it, I have opened the door to even greater findings."

There was a real fervor in Devere's voice, almost an awe at the miracles he foresaw because of his successful research.

"You will see what I am doing, and I guarantee you will be surprised," he continued. "In fact, you may be able to help me. For a long time, I've needed someone like you. There are some natives helping, but they aren't much good in this kind of work."

"If you can keep others from dying of the Fever, I will help any way I can," Ki-Gor told him.

"Ah, fine!" Devere said enthusiastically. "If what I plan succeeds, not one single person will ever have the Fever again." They walked on in silence, both sunk in their own thoughts about the Wasuli malady, until the doctor glanced up, declared, "Well, here we are at my quarters."

Ki-Gor was not prepared for the sight that greeted him. He had expected a modest camp with one or two thatched huts and a handful of native workers. Instead, he saw a series of large, well-built log buildings and many natives moved about their tasks. The entire place was unusually neat and clean. As they approached one of the buildings, Ki-Gor saw how carefully and solidly it was constructed. Those massive walls would task the strength of a bull elephant.

Another unusual thing attracted the White Lord's notice. Not a single native stopped work to stare at the stranger. If anything, the speed with which the blacks labored was increased by the appearance of Devere and the White Lord. Ordinarily, the least distraction was welcomed by natives as a reason for shelving their duties.

The doctor led the way into the building, through a series of comfortably furnished rooms where he apparently lived, and then into a large, clean, white room.

"This is my laboratory," he said proudly.

To Ki-Gor's untutored eyes it was merely a room filled with an unusual jumble of bottles, glass tubes, and odd-looking contraptions. He had no way of knowing that this was an exceptionally well equipped laboratory.

"You see, I first learned of this Fever of the Black Water, as the natives call it, when I was practicing in America. My complacent associates did not appreciate my research," Devere said, his lips curling scornfully.

"They tried to ruin me, but I fooled them. I came here secretly and carried on my work. And now my success is almost complete."

KI-GOR looked puzzled. "You mean they fought you?"

Devere threw back his head and laughed, an unpleasant, humorless laugh.

"Yes," he said. "They fought me because they were afraid. I found that the secret of the Fever is also the secret of growth. I knew that if I learned the 'why' of the Fever, then I would know how to speed up or retard the development of a human or an animal. But my little world did not understand," he sneered. "They said I was cruel, unbalanced and a lot of other foolish things."

The man's strange manner began to make Ki-Gor uneasy. He understood little of this harangue about the "outside world," but the doctor's nervous intensity appeared hardly normal to the jungle man.

"But you can cure the Fever?" Ki-Gor asked, interested in that one point only.

"Yes, of course," Devere answered impatiently. "I can cause it and I can cure it. But the Fever has become the least important part of my research." He pointed to the monkey Ki-Gor held. "Take that creature, for instance. With a few months of treatment, I can alter its looks, size, and personality completely."

He paced the floor, his hands clasped behind him, his thoughts ranging far beyond the confines of the room. His black eyes sparked with his disturbing inner drive.

"I fear," the doctor stated, "you don't realize the fascinating possibilities." He swung about in his pacing, faced the White

Lord triumphantly. "My findings may well change the whole world. Then we will see what those fools who drove me out say."

While the doctor talked, Malu stood with his arms folded over his chest, staring balefully at the White Lord. Ki-Gor almost forgot the black was present so little did the warrior's obvious enmity matter to him.

"I have experimented with many animals," Devere told the jungle man. "Now I'm ready to experiment with the higher order of life—with man. But the experiments are exacting and I must have only the finest physical and mental specimens to work with."

He broke off his discourse, and his eyes flicked over the White Lord's splendid physique. His meaning was obvious.

"I am interested only in curing the Fever," declared Ki-Gor flatly.

The doctor laughed unpleasantly, slapped his right hand against his thigh. At this sound, Malu stepped forward with lightning speed, smashed a rock-hard fist against Ki-Gor's temple. Staggered by the unexpected attack, Ki-Gor swayed, dropped the screaming Boko to the floor. Twice more, before the White Lord could swing to face him, the squat warrior drove pile-driving blows into the jungle man.

Then Devere snatched up a length of wood from a nearby table, stepped forward smiling.

He struck hard and mercilessly. Ki-Gor crumpled to the floor.

Devere put down the piece of wood carefully, stared down at the unconscious figure.

"Well, Malu," he said pleasantly, "fate is with me. Despite Kalido's bungling, this fool came straight into my hands."

VI

PAIN stabbed through Helene. Her chest was an aching, throbbing hurt as she strained to breathe. She whirled and spun in an endless black funnel. Then sparks showered up and a sheet of flame seared through her body.

Abruptly the agony was gone. Her breath came easily. She opened her eyes slowly, and though the room wavered in rainbow-hued mist, she could see. After a time, even the difficulty with her eyes was

gone, and she looked about her wonderingly.

The red-haired girl lay in a large, high-ceilinged room. Helene tried to move, found she was securely bound to a heavy table. Turning her head, she saw cabinets of equipment, test-tubes, X-ray machines, shining medical instruments. She was bewildered by this strange room, at a loss to understand how or why she was there.

Her mind was a blank as to her past. She could think and reason, but she could not remember. Her bonds pressed tightly against her arms and legs, and trying to move to ease the numbness, she caused the wooden table to creak.

Out of sight behind her, a chair scraped on the floor as someone stood up. Helene heard slow, measured footsteps approach her. Without a word, the man came up beside her, studied her face closely. He was a lean, distinguished-looking man, gray at the temples with black, burning eyes. He took her pulse carefully, then leaned forward to pull back one of her eyelids, note every detail of the eye.

Helene watched the man's calm, expressionless face, tried to remember who he was. By his manner she knew he was a doctor, but he was utterly unfamiliar. His inspection completed, he pursed his lips, stood watching her with a curious detached air.

"Please stop standing there and undo these straps," she said in sudden anger. "Do you think I'm comfortable here?"

Her words shattered his reverie. He roused himself from his thoughts and with a sardonic smile, began to loosen her bonds. He placed an arm under her shoulders, helped her to sit up on the edge of the table.

"Excuse my thoughtlessness," he said. "I'm so little around ladies, I forgot my manners." He watched her bite her lips with the pain of moving. "The soreness in your muscles will pass soon," he reassured her.

She got down from the table gingerly, walked slowly about, easing the stiffness from her limbs. The man's eyes followed her, running over her slim, firm body.

"Perhaps it is a good thing you are here, after all," he declared suddenly.

Helene looked at him, frowning, still hoping her memory would flow back any

minute and she would know what this was all about.

"I wondered at first," he continued, "but I decided to take a chance. Now I believe I'll be glad. Maybe it is a good idea to have a woman around here."

The man's words made little sense to Helene, but she did not like his tone. She walked up to him, her gaze cool and steady.

"I'm Dr. Ralph Devere," he put in quickly before she could speak. "And what is your name?"

Automatically, she opened her mouth to reply. But no words came. Flushing, she turned away.

"So your memory is gone," Devere said softly. "I guessed as much."

"All right, then," Helene declared angrily, "who am I, and where am I?"

Dr. Devere walked toward her. "You are in the most isolated, forgotten spot in the Congo. You are in my laboratory on an island surround by water. And as to who you are, that really won't matter to you here."

He reached an insinuating hand for her waist. As his fingers touched her bare midriff, Helene twisted away and struck hard. Her open palm struck Devere full in the mouth, made him curse with pain. He drew back his fist to hit the red-haired girl, and then he caught himself. Immediately, he was calm, self-controlled again, but his black, unblinking eyes sparked with anger.

"Excuse me, my dear," he said, his lips twisting in an ugly sneer. "I will not be so forward again. I will wait for you to come to me next time, and I warrant I won't have too long to wait."

He raised his voice in a shout, "Malu! Malu!" The barrel-chested black came into the room at a run at his master's call. Scarcely glancing at Helene, the white man strode from the room, ordering the native to bring the girl along.

Helene was shoved roughly down a long hall, out into the bright sunlight and then into another building. From the outside, the building had looked much the same as the one that housed Devere's laboratory, but inside it was drastically different. Helene saw that it was a strange and terrible jail. She was led slowly down a long corridor and made to stop and peer

into each of the strongly barred cells. The creatures in those cells were monsters from a nightmare.

The sight and stench of them made her head reel, her stomach tighten with nausea.

IN the first cell, a gigantic creature smothered in gross rolls of fat, lay gasping on the floor. Gnarled, twisted legs too weak to hold up the vast weight, pawed aimlessly at the wooden floor from time to time, ever renewing a vain attempt to rise. The hair had long since fallen from the creature's skin and its body was covered with livid red patches.

"What—what is it?" asked Helene, sickened by the unbelievable sight.

Devere glanced at her, smiled.

"Why, this, my dear, was once an ordinary wild boar. But under my capable care, you can see how beautifully he has developed. I admit, of course, the job could be improved on, but we all have to learn."

In the next compartment, a creature with a great, swollen belly hobbled awkwardly about. Its overlong arms trailed the floor, dragging like limp, useless appendages. Its huge, sightless eyes bulged from its head, and saliva ran in constant dribblets from its gaping mouth.

"That was one of my pet monkeys," explained Devere, hurrying Helene on to the next cell as though he were displaying priceless thoroughbreds. "And here is a splendid specimen."

In a far corner of the cell, a black figure squatted. Helene could vaguely make out its monstrous legs, but could see little more in the shadows.

"Up, up! you stupid dango, so we can admire you," the white man yelled.

A hoarse pitiful moan sounded from the dark corner. The dark mass of flesh quivered, and then straining and whimpering, the tremendous bulk fought to its feet. It stood swaying back and forth, having difficulty retaining its balance. Its head was a swollen, bulbous thing without a single clear feature except for two tiny red eyes. Every part of the body was distorted, elephantine in size, yet clearly this dreadful embodiment once had been a human being.

"That—why this is a man," Helene gasped. "What on earth is this horrible

place? What terrible thing are you doing here?"

The doctor savored the horror which permeated the girl. He watched her shudder, tear her gaze from the cell.

"It is plain, isn't it," he said. "I am making a few improvements on Nature! I am learning to create men or beasts in the image I desire. I can make them grow to whatever size or shape I want."

Helene drew away from Devere. "It is unbelievable anyone could do this to any creature, let alone a fellow man."

Devere laughed mockingly at the sickened girl.

"A world-shaking discovery such as mine is not made easily, my dear. Naturally, I can't expect perfection in the beginning. But each experiment brings me closer to my goal. You are letting the childish emotion of pity blind you to the true worth of what you are seeing."

He looked from Helene to the grotesque example of his handiwork inside the cell. From the expression on his face it was difficult to tell whether he was gloating or admiring.

"If this sight upsets you," he continued, his voice a thin, grating rasp, "you should have been here in the beginning. We really had some unusual sights then, didn't we, Malu?"

The black's mouth sheared in what was meant to be a grin. He nodded his head in quick agreement, remembering with pleasure the distorted bodies which had filled the cell block.

"I believe the spadework is done now," Devere declared proudly. "I am ready to create a race of supermen, a race of giants. Then we will see what those scientific nincompoops in the United States and Europe will say—after it is too late for whatever they might try to say or do to matter."

A STRANGE elation at the thought of what he would do seized the white man. He turned briskly, strode down the corridor. He made Helene stop at each cell while he gave a full explanation concerning the unfortunate being under inspection. Helene, by now was too sickened by the horrors of the place to see clearly the parade of moaning, pain-wracked monstrosities, but Devere continued to drag

her along, his words tumbling out in an increasingly excited outpouring.

Though she tried to close her ears to the man's words, Helene could not escape his meaning. He foresaw himself as leader of a race of obedient giants, tremendous men anxious to do his least bidding, ready to wreak vengeance on a world he thought was arrayed against him. Though his twisted mind had mastered the secret of making flesh, bone and muscle grow far beyond its normal limits, she gathered from his explanation, the unnatural process drained all semblance of mentality from his grotesque subjects, left them great moronic hulks of flesh.

Then the sound and stench of the cell block was behind her and Helene drew gulps of fresh air into her lungs. But the ordeal her captor planned was only beginning. He led her to the next building, and thinking she was to be shown more awful sights, the red-haired girl threw all her strength into an attempt to jerk loose from Malu.

She fought silently, desperately. She pitted speed and agility against the black's strength. The slim, gold-skinned girl twisted, bit, and kicked, hoping by the sudden violence of her attack to slip free. But all the power in her lithe body was as nothing against the native's steel muscles. He cuffed her roughly, twisted her back until it seemed her spine would crack, and then sliding a sweaty arm under her, he picked her up, flung her over his shoulder.

"The whip would quiet her," Malu eagerly suggested, standing with the girl held helplessly.

"There are better ways to do these things, Malu," his master said with satisfaction. "A few hours in the common cell with my beginners and she will beg for the shelter of my protecting arms."

He laughed coarsely at the sadistic plan he was employing to break Helene's spirit, anticipating the sight of her begging him to take her from the cell at any cost.

For once, Malu did not show unqualified approval of his master's ideas. The black's arm tightened around the girl's bare thighs. Clearly, he considered her too fair a prize to throw to the doctor's newest prisoners. Devere knew the thought in Malu's mind, but instead of being irritated, the native's disgruntled manner tickled him.

"You know the effect my first few injections have on those men," he said blandly. "Come now, carry her inside and let's watch the dangos fight for her."

Malu hesitated a moment, but only for a moment. He, too, was deathly afraid of this lean, cruel white man and dared not oppose his will. He walked forward when at Devere's call two natives inside the building threw open the door.

The interior of this structure was greatly different from the other one Helene had been taken through. Instead of building rows of individual cells, Devere had constructed four walls and a roof over a deep, rectangular pit. The prisoners were placed together in this pit for their initial series of injections. Later, those who survived the terror of the early treatment and were judged worthy of continued study were removed to another building and placed in individual cells.

A walk around the four sides of the pit allowed the guards to look down on their charges, watch their every move. The only way to get in or out of the pit was by using a ladder which the guards lowered from their vantage point. About twenty-five prisoners milled about on the earth floor. Some of them charged back and forth frenziedly, while others staggered around with the difficulty of drunken men. They screamed and fought, smashed blindly against each other and against the walls. Occasionally, one would drop to the floor jerking convulsively, only to climb to his feet again as soon as the fit passed.

It was apparent that Devere's growth drug wrought drastic changes in their nervous systems and physical structures from the time of the first injection. The prisoners were like caged beasts driven mad by mistreatment and confinement. Though they had not yet been under treatment long enough to lose the look of men, the restraints and disciplines by which men live had shattered under the mental and bodily changes induced by Devere's drug.

At the doctor's command, guards hastened to drop the ladder into the pit. The scrape of the ladder striking the prison floor brought instant silence. The prisoners stopped their pacing, turned their faces up to watch the guards above them. The lowering of the ladder ordinarily meant more hated injections for the tormented

men. The apprehensive faces watched without understanding as Malu put Helene down the ladder, forced her to start climbing down by stamping his foot on her fingers.

HELENE halted halfway down, glanced at the natives waiting below. A chill ran through her at the sight of those strange, tense men who had not yet realized she was a prisoner also. She looked up into Devere's sneering countenance, knew he expected her to cringe and beg him not to make her enter the pit. Seeing his complete lack of normal feeling, the madness in his glittering, inhuman eyes, she felt a depth of hate and contempt burst over her that she never had known before.

Then calmly, deliberately she made her choice. The strange void in her memory kept her from knowing who she was or how she came to be in this place of hell, but it did not in the least affect the courage and self-control which Ki-Gor many times had admired. Helene went bravely into the pit, and as she climbed down the last few rungs she saw the shocked surprise which flashed over Devere's face. He was pained at this unexpected turn in a game which he thought he had planned so well. He wanted only to bluff the girl, frighten her into cringing obedience, and now the little fool betrayed him by choosing to face the prisoners instead of going on her knees to him.

His chagrin showed plainly. Then his face darkened in anger and clenching his fists he sprang to the edge of the pit. He glared at Helene, his mouth working spasmodically as he fought to speak. Then remembering that Malu and the guards were watching him closely, he brought himself under control, turned on his heels and strode from the building.

Helene smiled a thin, fleeting smile at her triumph, but in the next moment as her feet struck the damp earth, she took a deep breath, turned grimly to meet whatever fate awaited her. She stood tautly, determined to boldly face these abnormal beings. Her eyes swept slowly, narrowly over the scattered prisoners, trying to judge them, weigh their attitude.

They were all big men, larger than average as though they had been carefully selected for their fate. They were broad

shouldered, deep chested men, with the muscled arms and backs of warriors. About half of the prisoners showed already the ravages of the growth drug, their features thickening, their once perfectly proportioned bodies beginning to lose their symmetry. For these, time ran out quickly. Soon they would be lumbering, mountainous hulks locked away in individual cells.

These who showed the effects of Devere's injections in their physical changes were slower and duller than their fellows. The newer prisoners were more frenzied, the shock of the powerful drug blasting their personalities, whipping them into a delirium of meaningless action. These men had not entirely lost their ability to grasp events around them, but they no longer reasoned clearly. They were like drowning men, floundering and fighting in a last meaningless burst of strength to save themselves.

Helene was undecided whether to walk toward the men or stand where she was. Behind her she heard the ladder pulled up by the guards. As though the ladder's removal was signal, a babble of sound went up from the prisoners. They began to walk toward her, converging from all sides.

HELENE fought off a feeling of panic as the strange, unsmiling blacks closed about her. She managed a calm, friendly expression, but she dared not trust her voice to speak. There was something about these tortured beings that frightened her, made her flesh crawl.

The men stood watching her, devouring her with their eyes. No one spoke or made the least friendly gesture. Then one native, larger than the others, shouldered his way to the front.

"This woman is mine," he cried, his voice a hoarse, ugly snarl. "She is mine and I will kill the one who touches her."

He moved in front of Helene, facing the others, his great arms held ready for the man who dared challenge him. Helene looked at the tense group, and she knew then that these prisoners were reduced to jungle beasts, battered by the growth drug from men to savage, ruthless creatures. There was a ripple of movement as the group stirred and grumbled at the big fellow's unexpected action.

With a savage growl, a prisoner launched

himself from the crowd, drove at Helene's self-appointed master. The powerful black was ready for the onslaught. He smashed his fists against the smaller man like clubs, and as his assailant stumbled, he lowered his head, butted with pile-driving power. The smaller prisoner grunted explosively as he fell beneath the shock, then screamed as he was picked up, flung bodily over the crowd.

The big man whirled back to his post before Helene, stood with his shoulders hunched forward, ready to meet any other attacker. Helene, upset as she was, could not help noticing the swift sureness with which the man moved. His balance was as perfect as that of a normal man.

She watched him slash into another challenger, pound him with lightning blows, fell him with a rock-hard right hand that exploded with sudden and terrible accuracy against an exposed jaw. The man fought with a murderous intensity. Though his opponents were brutal, powerful fighters, they attacked wildly, without plan or method. Too, the drug had destroyed their coordination, made their movements jerky, uncertain. Apparently, the injections had failed to harm this ebony giant's nervous system.

The merciless battling of this man stirred Helene's memory. There was something familiar about his method of fighting, but looking at his massive figure, she could not remember ever having seen him before. His body was cut and scratched and he had an ugly scalp wound, but in his terrible anger, these wounds suffered in some previous conflict were forgotten. He crouched, facing his fellow prisoners, his flaming eyes alert for the least hostile move. He meant this woman to be his, and clearly, any who thought to oppose him must be prepared to battle to the death.

Helene's face was drawn and white as she saw the opposition to the big man waver and fade. There was no escape for her. She was trapped, knowing full well no help would come from the guards. Strangely, the will to live flamed even higher in these lost men than in normal persons, and thus, they fell back before the grim deadliness of the big fellow. He alone of the entire group was willing to fight to the end for this pale-skinned woman, and his dreadful ferocity chilled

their ardor for combat. Muttering, they split off singly and in small groups, drifted away.

Helene stood alone with her captor. He had not turned his face to the girl since that first moment when he thrust his way forward to lay claim to her. Now that the others were gone, she waited tensely. She saw the tight-strung muscles in his back relax, heard him draw a great breath into his lungs as though he sighed with relief. Slowly, he wheeled about.

Her eyes, hostile and hate-filled, her small hands clenched into fists, Helene watched him like a cornered animal. And then a curious thing happened. He gave her a friendly, reassuring smile, and when he spoke, his voice was soft and reassuring.

"I didn't know how it would go at first," he said, "but luck was with us and I bluffed them off." With sudden concern, he added, "But how on earth did you get here?"

Abruptly, he stopped talking. He looked at her curiously, a frown creasing his forehead. Then realizing what was wrong, he gave a low exclamation at his stupidity.

"I'm a fool, Helene. Why, of course, you don't know me," he said self-accusingly. "I was the same way the first day, but your memory will come back soon. It must be from some drug they gave us in the Wasuli village."

He paused, rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Helene's eyes never left him, yet they were puzzled now instead of hostile.

"You weren't in the Wasuli village, though," he said suddenly.

Helene cut him off. Recognition dawned in her face. The word "Wasuli" pierced the dark curtain which obscured her mind.

"Tembu George!" she exclaimed. "Thank heavens, it is you." She struggled to remember more. "I was in the village. Ki-Gor and I came when he heard you were dying." Her eyes widened as she realized what she said. "But it can't be!"

Tembu George's expression grew grim. "I wasn't badly hurt. Somehow one of Devere's monsters got away from here," he explained. "I saw it, tried to kill it, but it charged me, knocked me senseless. My men carried me to the Wasuli village and when I came to, only Kalido was with me. I made the mistake of telling him what I had seen."

TEMBU GEORGE'S jaw set hard as he recalled the Wasuli king's treachery. The Masai were an honorable people, and one thing they never forgot or forgave was underhanded trickery by a pretended friend. Helene knew the fate in store for Kalido if ever he fell into the Masai chieftain's hands.

"Kalido lost no time in pressing a sweet tasting drink on me," Tembu George continued. "That's the last I remember until I woke up with that Devere standing over me. Those two are working together, with Kalido selecting the victims for the doctor. They were afraid of what might happen if I told people about the monster."

Helene's mind was clearing now. As she listened to the Masai leader, she traced back over the happenings in the Wasuli village. One revealing incident stood out clearly.

"Of course, you're right," she said. "I see it all now. Kalido was trying to drug Ki-Gor. That night at the mourning feast, I drank from Ki-Gor's water gourd. He didn't touch it."

At mention of the White Lord of the Jungle, Tembu George's eyes gleamed. Ki-Gor was free. The black man was suddenly filled with hope.

"Devere hasn't given me an injection yet," he said thankfully. "Ki-Gor will find us, I know. Maybe he will find us before we get like those others."

Helene bit her lips and said nothing. Let Tembu George hope if he liked. For once, she looked for no help from her mate. Ki-Gor would follow her to the ends of the earth if he suspected she were alive, but he would accept her death, just as she and Ki-Gor had accepted Tembu George's death, without the least suspicion anything was wrong. Devere's plan was as perfect as could be devised. No one would ever suspect that the Fever of the Black Water was only a man-made malady, a drug which gave its victims every appearance of death.

Helene looked across the pit to the pitiful group of prisoners. How soon would it be before Tembu George was one of those maddened, abnormal creatures? How soon until she herself was a grotesque, swollen being more animal than human? A feeling of utter hopelessness swept over her, and she pressed her hand hard against her eyes to shut out the sight.

VII

DIM, gray light filled the room. It was a small room with one tiny window high up on the wall. Ki-Gor blinked his eyes, slowly became aware of the ache in his head. He stared at the unfamiliar surroundings, wondering at first how he came there.

Then remembering Devere, he climbed to his feet. It came to him with a rush now. Thinking of Malu and the doctor, his face grew flint-hard. A cold fury possessed him. They had caught him off guard once, but the next time.

He padded about the room, trying the door, testing the timbers in the walls. His tremendous strength was of no avail against the log walls or the locked door. He was securely held, but this fact caused him no concern. In the past few days, the White Lord had suffered much, so much that he was past giving a great deal of importance to his own safety. With both Tembu George and Helene gone, the taste of life was no longer too good.

Ki-Gor thought now not so much of escape as revenge. All the hurt he had suffered centered on Devere and Malu. He meant to pay them back no matter what the cost. They had made their mistake, he felt, in leaving his hands and feet free. Sooner or later someone would come to get him, and then his opportunity to even the score also would come.

The White Lord sat down on the dirt floor. An hour went by, and then another, and he hardly moved. He waited with the patience of the jungle, apparently calm and relaxed, yet alert to the smallest sound. And the anger in him grew.

Then footsteps shuffled along the hall, halted at his room. The door creaked open and Devere stood there, a sardonic smile on his lean face. Ki-Gor knew there were others outside, but he could not see them.

"Ah! You were waiting for me," the doctor said. "You will learn I always think of my guests. I never forget them. Especially, a guest as valued as you."

Ki-Gor remained sitting in the middle of the small room. He regarded Devere without expression, calmly awaiting the moment when the doctor approached him.

"I have some good news for you," Devere continued in his mocking tone of false cheer. "Tembu George and your wife are both alive, and so far quite well. They are right here, I might add."

Ki-Gor neither moved nor spoke. Indeed, the man must take him for a fool. Had he not seen both Helene and Tembu George lying in death. It was a poor kind of joke even to use to torture a person.

"So you do not believe me," said the doctor reproachfully. "Kalido did provide an impressive ceremony for each of them, but the Wasuli king and I are old hands at this game. We give the customers their money's worth."

Devere laughed uproariously.

"They didn't die. They didn't even have any kind of illness. This Fever of the Black Water you talk about is merely a drug which I make and which Kalido gives to people I want to work on."

Interest sparked in Ki-Gor's gray eyes. He could not conceal it. Could this strange man be speaking the truth?

"I have learned, you see," continued Devere, "not only to speed up bodily growth, but to arrest it. The drug causes a state of suspended animation which lasts long enough for a person to be sent down the river to me."

Devere watched hope rise in Ki-Gor. He was enjoying himself immensely. It was a rare pleasure to toy with this arrogant jungle man. And to think, Kalido, brazen as he was, had trembled with fear when he suggested drugging the White Lord.

"It's an amusing fact," the doctor added, "but I didn't plan on receiving your wife. I was after you. Kalido bungled so that she got the drug intended for you, and of course, he had to carry the ceremony out."

Devere's words did not take immediate effect on the White Lord. Ki-Gor could not easily conceive of a scheme so utterly inhuman. A plot so vile and base almost surpassed his understanding. But staring into the infinitely evil eyes of the doctor, he knew Devere spoke the truth.

His anger exploded with sudden violence, tore away the control with which he had so carefully held himself in. Ki-Gor's lips curled back over his white teeth and from his throat came a chilling, animal

snarl. He came to his feet in a quick, cat-like leap, drove for Devere with all the blinding speed in his great body.

BUT Devere had planned well. He was not caught off guard by the jungle man's attack. The doctor pivoted on one foot, and crying, "Slam the door," slid into the safety of the hallway. The heavy door crashed into place and the bar fell an instant before Ki-Gor struck it. Devere's laugh rang out at his complete success in goading the White Lord beyond endurance.

At the hateful sound of the man's laughter, Ki-Gor went berserk. He plunged against the door, the shattering drive of his steel muscles catapulting him forward time and again. The door shuddered and creaked under the shock of the giant white man's power. It was unbelievable a human could exert such force, and seeing the brute power of the man, even Devere fell to silence. A trickle of fear ran over the guards standing in the hall. Armed though they were, they had no desire to meet this raging jungle man.

The moment of uneasiness passed. Muscle and bone, no matter how strong the will that controlled it, was no match for the heavy timbers. Ki-Gor could not break out. He stood away from the door, panting with his exertions, his eyes narrow with frustrated anger.

He was trapped, helpless, and the knowledge knifed through the red mist of his hate, stabbed with agonizing pain into his consciousness. And as he stood there, beads of sweat gathering on his forehead, he was wracked with the thought that Helene, too, suffered in the power of this madman.

Devere squinted through the narrow grill in the door. He spoke over his shoulder to Malu: "Now bring Nyga!"

The black grunted with surprise at the order, then sped away eagerly. An excited murmur rose from the guards. They had not anticipated this treat. Shortly, Ki-Gor heard the heavy sound of footsteps in the hall, wondered what new plan of torture the doctor had now conceived.

The door to the cell opened wide and a great bulk stood there completely filling the frame. It was a huge, dull-eyed black man, with tremendous sloping shoulders

and long gorilla-like arms. Ki-Gor looked at the monster figure and into his mind flashed the picture of the strange creature he had hunted with N'Geeso. The other had been a true gorilla, whereas this one was a native. Both misshapen beings, Ki-Gor realized, were Devere's handiwork. The doctor did not lie when he said he could control growth.

"Bring him out, Nyga, but don't kill him," commanded Devere. Then speaking to Ki-Gor, he said, "It's time for your first treatment. Nyga likes to help me with my patients. Maybe before long you will be a fine, obedient fellow just like him."

Nyga's grossness revolted Ki-Gor. This moronic mountain of muscle was obviously one of Devere's more successful experiments, an elephantine jailor he used to beat his prisoners into subjection. This, then, was the kind of creature into which the doctor planned to transform him.

"Go on, Nyga. Get him!" urged Malu, anxious to see the White Lord brought to his knees.

The huge black spread his arms slowly, bringing them out wide from his body. His face registered no emotion, no feeling. He leaned slightly forward, hunching his shoulders, tilting his oddly shaped head so that his chin sank in folds of fat and muscle. Then, with ponderous steps, he advanced on Ki-Gor.

The White Lord waited, hands at his sides, while the gigantic black moved cautiously toward him. It was clear what the native meant to do. His plan was to scoop the white man into his arms, smother the strength from him, carry him away as his master ordered. And to the consternation of the watching guards, Ki-Gor did not cringe or curse or even move. To all appearances, he was going to submit without a struggle.

Devere watched the spectacle, and his lips thinned in a sneer. So the vaunted White Lord, just as with other men, knew when he was beaten. Yet the thought was hardly in the doctor's mind, when Ki-Gor acted.

A BOLT of lightning was no more difficult to follow than the jungle man's movement. He whirled under the black's outstretched arms at the moment Nyga

thought to seize him. He drove with all his might into the native's vast belly, sank his shoulder deep in the bulging fat. The colossus grunted in pain, heaved backward a half step. As Nyga raised his hands to drive them down on Ki-Gor's head, the lithe white man slid to the right, smashed with the lower edge of his open hand twice against the monster's side.

Then Nyga, spurred to greater speed by the pain of Ki-Gor's blows, caught the jungle man with a sweeping blow of his forearm. The White Lord careened against the wall, flung aside like a weightless leaf. He knew a straight blow from Nyga's hands would shatter his skull or crush his chest with ease. The huge Negro's only vulnerable point was his slowness.

Ki-Gor crouched, the gray blaze of his eyes never leaving his adversary. Then he threw himself forward again, his body straining as he gained terrific momentum in a bare three steps. He lunged in a low dive full against the side of Nyga's right leg. He struck at the knee, attempting to cripple the black by ripping the tendons, shattering the socket.

The White Lord was successful—too successful. Nyga gave a hoarse scream as Ki-Gor's more than two hundred pounds of brawn blasted against his knee. The giant staggered, and too clumsy to regain his balance, he toppled in a heap. The monster fell headlong on top of the jungle man, his crushing weight striking like a collapsing roof.

Ki-Gor's breath went out of him with a rush. He lay dazed by the shock, pinned helplessly under the massive black body. Nyga, angered at this first prisoner to ever dare attack him, grunted with hurt, rolled slowly to his hands and knees. He reached roughly for the White Lord, got ponderously to his feet, and jerking his victim up with him, raised him high overhead.

Devere saw that Nyga meant to dash the jungle man against the wall. He planned no such sudden end for the White Lord. The doctor sped forward, small beside the brute he had molded.

"Down! Put him down!" he screamed. "Hurt him and I will have you lashed to an ant hill, you stupid pig."

Nyga came to his senses under the lash of words. Strangely, he trembled before

the doctor's wrath, meekly lowered Ki-Gor. He stood like a whipped child, nervous and fearful, his dim mind groping to discover the wrong he had done. This jungle man had hurt him and then when he tried to hurt him back, Devere grew angry. It was confusing, but Nyga resolved to even this score with Ki-Gor the first time the doctor was not around. With the doctor's abuse, hate for Ki-Gor was born in the giant, yet now at Devere's bidding he carried the White Lord out of the cell and down the corridor as carefully as his clumsy hands permitted.

KI-GOR was not unconscious when Nyga took him into the laboratory, but he was still stunned. In any case, the remorseless grip in which he was held made resistance impossible. As Nyga placed him on the table, Malu and the doctor quickly buckled heavy leather straps across his arms, legs, and chest to bind him firmly.

Devere brusquely waved Malu and Nyga out of the room. He studied the White Lord, busied himself with a number of preliminary tests. He was wholly absorbed in his work for a time, seeming to forget that Ki-Gor's cold eyes never left him. He paused occasionally to jot down notes in a small book. When he was finished, the absorbed look left his face, the professional air changed back to the mocking, taunting manner Ki-Gor already knew.

"Well, everything is as I hoped," he said, leaning against the table. "You're a splendid subject. Exactly what I needed."

He cocked his head to the side, rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"You are the first white man I've treated," Devere confided. "That's quite an honor. Frankly, I put a lot of faith in you. These blacks Kalido sends me go to pieces too quickly. I believe you'll stand up a lot longer."

He reflected on his words, watching to see Ki-Gor's reaction. When no comment was forthcoming from the White Lord, he tried again.

"Uh, between us, from the physical standpoint, my experiments have been successful. Take Nyga, for instance. He's not a bad job. But I've had trouble with the mental side. The injections seem to destroy the mind, no matter what I try."

Devere straightened up, rubbed his

hands together. From his leisurely manner, he was obviously enjoying himself. It was pleasant to have one of his own kind to toy with.

"Oh, well, I'll whip it one of these days," he continued. "If not with you, then with the next, maybe. In science, you must expect mistakes and failures before you finally work out your problems."

Ki-Gor lay perfectly still, his face expressionless. He meant to give this insane man none of the satisfaction of seeing him cringe or beg. But knowing that Helene lived and was in this madman's grasp, Ki-Gor's mind was a ferment of desperation. He could not, he must not let Devere start him on the road to death.

He must escape. And yet, though his thoughts raced to find some solution, Ki-Gor knew there was none.

THE White Lord had faced danger and death many times, and always there had been some choice he could make. Always there had been a chance, however slim, he could take. This time he could do nothing. He was utterly powerless. No possible avenue of escape was open to him.

Devere walked away from him now. Ki-Gor watched the doctor go to a basin, carefully wash his hands. He saw him open a cabinet, take out a glass object fitted with a long needle. It was the first hypodermic needle Ki-Gor had ever seen, but he guessed its purpose.

Devere inspected the needle closely, frowned. Something about it did not please him. From a large bottle of distilled water, he filled a small container. Then he filled the needle to test it.

"This cursed climate ruins everything," he suddenly sputtered.

Angrily, he put the water-filled needle down on a small work table, went back to the cabinet and took out another hypodermic. The new one functioned to suit him, so he picked up a small black bottle sealed with wax, opened it, filled the hypodermic from it with a clear liquid.

Ki-Gor felt his throat muscles constrict as the doctor walked toward him. For the White Lord, this was the end of hope. He watched Devere's deliberately slow steps, and though he felt his brain must burst with tension, he gritted his teeth,

held himself in such iron control he showed no single trace of emotion.

When Devere was almost at the table, voices sounded in the hall outside the laboratory.

One voice was especially loud and excited. The doctor stopped, listened intently. Then a smile crept over his face. He regarded the hypodermic needle, then put it down carefully on the table beside Ki-Gor, turned and strode from the room.

This unexpected reprieve took the White Lord by surprise. Seconds passed before he collected himself. He took a deep breath, drew up every ounce of his strength in a mighty effort to snap the leather bonds that held him. The great muscles of his arms writhed and twisted, then set hard as he tried to jerk free. Blood swept into his face and veins stood out on his forehead with the strain. He twisted and turned until his body ached with the agony of his effort.

But the bonds held. Devere had built this table for hysterical, fear-crazed patients, and he had done his job well. Ki-Gor, with all his unleashed jungle power, knew he could never break free.

In the blackness of this knowledge, the White Lord sank back on the table. He lay still and tense, listening for the sound that would tell him of Devere's return. His keen ears picked up and magnified the least sound as he waited.

Then, abruptly, he caught his breath. What was that sound? It came again, more distinctly now. There was no mistaking it. It was a monkey's nervous, disturbed chatter.

Ki-Gor raised his head as far as possible, and down at the end of the room he saw Helene's pet monkey move from behind a stack of boxes. In the confusion the day before when Malu and Devere attacked Ki-Gor, the monkey fled behind the boxes, and forgotten, the frightened little creature remained there.

Because of his fear of Devere, Boko stayed in hiding as long as the doctor was in the room with Ki-Gor. Now that he knew Helene was a prisoner, the White Lord understood Boko's fear of the doctor. Apparently, the man and his servant, Malu, had mistreated the monkey when they first captured Helene. Ki-Gor had an idea they had tossed Boko from

the canoe when Helene first arrived, trying to drown him.

THE pet scrambled down the boxes, hurried to Ki-Gor. He peered happily into the White Lord's face, chattered with delight. Boko snuggled against his master, and obviously reassured, was quiet for a time. But monkey-like, he soon became restless, began to prowling around the table.

The gleaming hypodermic needle lying where Devere had left it on the table beside Ki-Gor caught Boko's eye. He inspected the shining object, gingerly picked it up. Then, as though sensing the strange trinket was connected with the hated doctor, he hastily put it down, retreated a step. Curiosity soon got the best of him, and reaching out again, Boko retrieved the object.

Ki-Gor's eyes were on the monkey, but he hardly noted what the pet did. The White Lord's mind was turned inward, his thoughts racing back to the clearing by Silver River, to the peaceful, joy-filled days with Helene that he would know no more. He saw his flame-haired mate running to greet him when he returned from the hunt. He saw her full lips pout as he teased her. He heard her soft, warm voice as she called his name. All the countless small things of their life together pressed in upon him in torturing clearness. He even remembered her pleased expression the morning he brought her Boko, a frightened little waif whose mother had fallen prey to a leopard.

Ki-Gor's thoughts were abruptly wrenched from the past. He was staring at Boko. The monkey turned the gleaming hypodermic back and forth in his hand.

Helene's pet was his one slim hope of escape! In thinking of Helene, he thought also of the stratagem which might yet outwit Devere. How many times had he watched Boko retrieve small objects at Helen's command? If the monkey would obey his orders, there was still time perhaps to escape the fate the madman planned for him.

The White Lord twisted his head, stared across the room to the small table where Devere had discarded the faulty hypodermic. It looked no different from the needle Boko held so far as Ki-Gor could see.

Some tiny evidence of rust, some minor defect caused Devere to cast it aside. The doctor might never notice a switch of the needles.

"Go, Boko, go!" Ki-Gor hissed, jerking his head in the direction of the table.

The pet stopped playing, glanced at Ki-Gor in surprise. He cocked his head, studied the jungle man curiously. The words were the same ones his mistress used when they romped with sticks, but he had never heard the White Lord use them before. His button-eyes brightened as he decided Ki-Gor really meant he wanted to play.

Boko leaped from the table, scampered across the floor. He stopped from time to time to look back, see whether Ki-Gor meant him to go further. In his excitement, the monkey held tightly to the deadly hypodermic. Only once did he start to put it down, and then Ki-Gor, his voice suddenly anxious, urged the pet to keep moving, and in obeying, Boko retained his hold on the needle.

When the monkey reached the small table on which lay the hypodermic filled with harmless water, Ki-Gor called, "Up! Up!" Boko hesitated, bewildered by Ki-Gor's inability to give him any hand signals, any hints as to where he wanted him to go. Twice more the White Lord urged the monkey to climb the table, but the creature became ever more confused.

Ki-Gor saw his last chance for life slipping away. He bit his lips, casting desperately for a way to get Boko to do what he wanted. And then of his own accord, Boko did what Ki-Gor desired. The excited monkey, with a quick leap, bounded on the table top. Before the pet could move on, Ki-Gor acted.

"Pick it up," he ordered.

Boko twisted his head to look at the White Lord, and reassured he was playing the game all right, glanced about him. The gleam of the second hypodermic caught his attention. He reached for it with the same hand that held the deadly needle. The monkey hesitated a brief moment, but long enough for Ki-Gor's heart to skip a beat, then swiftly the little creature put down the needle he held, snatched up the other.

Boko held the water-filled hypodermic up triumphantly, whirled about, leaped to

the floor, came racing to the White Lord. He chattered happily, anticipating the praise he would receive. The monkey bounded up beside Ki-Gor, laid his hind proudly on the stable.

Before Ki-Gor could say a word, the monkey stiffened. Ki-Gor tensed, too. Devere's crisp, cold voice sounded outside the room. He was returning, and with him came a native, a black who laughed with delight at the doctor's words. Ki-Gor listened and knew that Kalido had come to gloat.

The frightened monkey scampered into hiding at the end of the laboratory as the two men entered the door. The Wasuli king, moving with conscious arrogance, strode completely around the helpless White Lord, his lips twisted in an ugly smirk. Devere watched appreciatively.

"So? Is this the lion of the jungle all men fear?" asked Kalido tauntingly. "Is this the great Ki-Gor?"

The Wasuli turned to Devere, pointed a scornful finger at the White Lord.

"It will be good to see him change into a blubbery, obedient elephant. I will come often to see the blankness creep into his eyes, the rolls of stinking fat gather on his body."

ANGER boiled through Ki-Gor's veins, churning in burning waves through his brain. Seeing Kalido unmasked, he realized for the first time the terrible hatred the Wasuli ruler had concealed. This man had allied himself with Devere to gain power and in his climb he had stopped at nothing. But Ki-Gor held himself in successfully, determined not to give Kalido the satisfaction of seeing his darts strike home.

"I was preparing to give him his first shot," Devere said, picking up the hypodermic.

Ki-Gor's mouth grew dry with tension as he waited to see whether the doctor would notice the shift of needles. Engaged in talking, Devere hardly glanced at his hand. Kalido asked how the drug would affect the jungle man.

"The shock will put him to sleep immediately. He will look like he is dying for about two days, then he will wake up."

Devere paused thoughtfully, studied Kalido closely.

"By the way, you came early this trip. Is anything wrong?"

Kalido did not reply immediately. His face sobered. Devere had guessed he had some problem that worried him.

"All goes well," he said slowly, "except that I worry about that skulking little dango, N'Geeso. Ordinarily, he would not spend the night in my village, but now he continues to stay on."

Devere shrugged his shoulders.

"Bah," he said. "Pygmies are always hungry. He's merely making the most of the opportunity to eat and drink."

Kalido frowned. "You don't know these small ones. They smell out every secret. I don't like it with N'Geeso nosing after me, sitting about the village watching, always watching. I want you to let me send him down the River of Silence."

The doctor shook his head against this suggestion. It was too soon to risk having another prominent warrior fall sick.

"Leave him alone," Devere ordered. "He can't know anything. He can't learn anything. You are foolish to fear a dumb, childish pygmy."

And Ki-Gor, listening to the conversation, smiled inwardly. If N'Geeso, who heartily despised the Wasuli, was still hanging around the village, then he did, indeed, have his suspicions aroused. The information gave the White Lord a great satisfaction. N'Geeso would never rest until he found what he sought, and some day, though the White Lord might not be alive to see it, the trail would lead to Kalido and Devere.

But Ki-Gor put N'Geeso from his mind for the time being. Devere stopped talking, caught the flesh of Ki-Gor's right arm with his fingers, held the hypodermic needle poised.

Ki-Gor knew the critical moment was at hand. Craftily, he played the part expected of him. He lunged against the leather bonds, fought desperately to tear loose. His jaw was set and grim, his eyes flaming with hate. And Devere, with mocking detachment, jabbed the needle home, stood calmly waiting for the reaction.

The White Lord fought on for a time, long enough for Devere to put the needle aside still without more than a glance. Then the jungle man fell back on the

table, lay limp and motionless. His eyes closed. He was to all intents unconscious. His breathing slowed and his mouth gaped open.

"He's a valuable specimen," said the doctor at last, his words breaking the quiet. "Exceptionally strong. The average man goes out much more quickly."

Kalido glared at the unmoving White Lord. He would never feel easy until the jungle man was a moronic giant stumbling obediently to carry out Devere's orders.

"We'll see how strong he is when you put him in the pit with the others," said the Wasuli vengefully. "A few of those crazy ones will handle him."

"Ah, but he isn't going to the pit," retorted the doctor. "I'm taking no chances with Ki-Gor. He will stay in a special cell and Nyga will watch him. I'm taking no chances on my prize getting hurt or escaping."

He watched Kalido's face fall, and smiling, he turned and strode to the door. "Nyga," he called. The huge man-beast came with heavy footsteps, lumbering into the room, shifting uneasily on his great legs as Devere untied Ki-Gor.

VIII

THOUGH his eyes were closed, Ki-Gor followed every move made in the room through his keen sense of smell and hearing. He knew when Devere walked toward him that he would be free of his bonds in another minute. Mentally, he debated the course he should take. His every instinct urged him to leap on the doctor, batter the crazed, inhuman man to a pulp. Every heritage of the jungle told him to rip his tormentor to pieces.

But he controlled himself. His personal meeting with Devere must wait yet a while. He must think first of Helene and Tembu George, and in order to save them, he needed more of a chance to escape than at present presented itself.

After all, Nyga with his resistless strength blocked the door. Nearby stood Kalido, a long Wasuli knife sheathed at his waist, a blade he would be only too eager to bring into play. Ki-Gor had no fear of them, but he realized they might cut off his escape, delay him until help

came. If he failed, there would be no second chance.

So Ki-Gor lay limp, unresisting, when Devere had Nyga pick him and carry him from the room. With his unerring sense of direction, the White Lord guessed in advance he was being taken back to the same cell. He heard the door creak open, showed no reaction as Nyga clumsily carried him into the room, dumped him unceremoniously on the cold floor. When the door slammed shut, he heard Devere order the hulking brute to stay there and stand guard. Then Devere's footsteps receded into the distance.

Ki-Gor remained quiet a long while. His return to this room was something he had not counted on. His spirits sank. His predicament was almost as bad as before. He would never be able to break out of this cell, and eventually Devere would guess his deception.

Then a strange fact broke on his consciousness. It was a thing a civilized man would never have noticed, for it had to do with Nyga's heavy scent. Emotions of fear and anger cause a subtle shift in the scent of a man or an animal, and Ki-Gor became aware that the huge black was boiling with fury.

The White Lord opened his eyes to tiny slits, and looking at the small panel in the door, he saw Nyga's enraged face. He realized with a start that he was the object of the brute's hate. Nyga had not forgotten his battle with Ki-Gor in this room, and now with his feared master out of sight, he lusted for an opportunity to deal with the white man who had dared to hurt him.

An idea took form in Ki-Gor's mind. He had tried once to smash the door and had failed. The barrier was too formidable for his muscles to shatter. But the irresistible power of the behemoth who glared at him could make kindling of those timbers. If he could tantalize Nyga into breaking into the room, he might be able to elude the unwieldy black and break free. It must be done quickly, though, before the noise brought Devere and his followers.

Ki-Gor sprang up, dashed forward snarling, smashed his hand into Nyga's dull features. Taken completely offguard, the giant grunted with pain. He blinked his

eyes, slow to grasp the fact that the hated white man had come alive, was actually seeking trouble. Then he bellowed with rage.

Nyga stood back from the door. His loose mouth twitched, began to dribble saliva. His eyes rolled wildly. Completely forgotten was Devere, gone any fear of the penalty the doctor would assess if Ki-Gor were injured. Nyga was obsessed with the desire to kill. He had suffered at this pygmy's hands before, and now this upstart dared challenge him again.

Nyga pulled awkwardly at the door. Devere had locked it, in addition to dropping the large crossbar. The maddened brute wasted no time trying to puzzle a means to open it. He backed away, took a huge step forward, threw all his immense weight against the barrier. It crackled and sagged. Nyga growled at the obstacle, wheeled back, lunged again.

The door blasted from its hinges, ripped apart under the monster's charge. And Nyga, propelled by the ferocity of his own attack, half-stumbled, half-fell into the cell as broken wood clattered against the walls and floor. He bellowed again, his inhuman, bloodcurdling tones reverberating in the room.

Ki-Gor crouched against the back wall, grim and tense as the leviathan burst through the timbers. The giant recovered his balance, heaved up to his full height. Nyga's shoulder was smeared with blood where the skin had ripped away when he struck the door, but he gave it no notice. His full attention was centered on the White Lord. His inflamed eyes in their puffy sockets were those of a crazed beast. His great, sagging belly worked with excitement.

Nyga spraddled his huge legs to steady himself. His ham-like hands were knotted into immense clubs. He was visibly gathering himself to drive at his cornered quarry, disable him with one charge. Yet Ki-Gor waited motionless, his arms pressed back on the wall, his weaponless hands wide-spread against the wood.

NARROWLY, Ki-Gor watched his kill-crazed opponent drawing on an instinct born of countless battles to tell him when and how to act. Then as the first slight shift of the giant's shoulder told

him Nyga was closing it, the jungle man moved with lightning speed. With his hand, he shoved away from the wall, gaining an impetus which had him running full speed by his second step.

The White Lord darted toward the left at the instant Nyga plunged forward. He raced as though he meant to skirt past the giant. The monster saw his intent, shifted with immense effort the direction of his charge, straining to reach the white man.

He hurled his vast bulk to pin Ki-Gor against the side wall.

But again the jungle man outwitted Nyga. His perfectly coordinated body was keyed to carry through this stratagem, the only possible device which could take him past the black in these crowded quarters.

Ki-Gor wheeled almost in full stride, and now every atom of strength in his steel-muscled legs flared into use. He reversed himself, racing back toward the wall he had just left. The unwieldy giant tried to shift his course for the second time, tried to follow the jungle man, but his awkward, clumsy legs could not match the smaller man's maneuver.

That brief interval in which Nyga was off balance, unable to wheel to block him, was Ki-Gor's objective. The lithe White Lord swerved toward the right hand wall and driving with terrific speed, he shot past the huge black, darted through the shattered door into the hall. Turning the opposite way from the laboratory, he ran full tilt toward the end of the hall where he saw the gleam of sunlight.

He stopped at the door, puzzled as to how to find Helene and Tembu George. He glanced outside, saw only one native close at hand. The man's long knife and spear told that he was a guard. The black stood lazily, watching something outside Ki-Gor's line of vision.

The White Lord strolled boldly into the open, moved with slow, relaxed steps toward the guard. He gambled on his leisurely pace exciting no suspicion, at least not until he was close on the black. His nerves tingled as step by step he approached the man, knowing he might turn at any time, send the spear whipping to cut him down. He was twelve steps from the Wasuli when the fellow threw him a

casual glance, ten steps when the guard's eyes suddenly sharpened.

Ki-Gor thought fast.

"Where is my friend, the doctor?" he asked.

The guard hesitated. He knew this white man should not be here, and yet Ki-Gor walked with the air of an honored guest. The White Lord lounged two steps nearer, before the black definitely decided something was wrong.

Ki-Gor saw the man's stomach muscles tighten, his spear arm start its upward swing. Then gone was his casual air. He could stall the black no longer. In the space of two more breaths, the spear would be hurtling at him. His relaxed leg muscles corded and flexed, and with a leopard's sudden, bursting drive, he raced at the Wasuli.

"Stop! I kill!" cried the native, jerking his spear to shoulder height for the cast.

But he reckoned not with the White Lord's incredible speed. The jungle man catapulted at him, steel-hard fingers closed about his throat, throttling off his final words.

The black tried to jab downward with the spear, but too quickly Ki-Gor was under the blow and against the native. The White Lord toppled the native backward, fell astride him as the force of the jolt ripped the spear from the warrior's grasp.

Ki-Gor was a savage, merciless fighting machine now. He was committed to win free or die. There was no turning back, no alternative, and knowing this he shed the skin-deep veneer of civilization acquired from Helene, fought with the terrible, explosive fury of a jungle killer.

His fingers dug into the native's throat, wrenched deep as though to choke the life from him. The black's eyes bugged out, his dark face puffed and twisted, and he bucked in futile, agonized desperation. Then as Ki-Gor saw the life draining from the man, he released his grip slightly, allowed the Wasuli to gasp a breath into his aching lungs.

"Quick, dango!" he snarled. "Where is the white girl? Speak or you die!"

Terror was in the native's eyes. The fight was gone from him. His torn throat muscles worked spasmodically as he strained to speak. His words were a faint, broken whisper.

"There," he said, pointing feebly toward the building which housed the pit.

Ki-Gor lifted the native's head a short distance above the hard-packed ground, then dashed it back. The Wasuli went limp, the blow knocking him unconscious. Ki-Gor pulled the man's long, curved knife from its sheath, snatched up the spear. The Wasuli would give no alarm for a long time.

The White Lord started to run to the building pointed out by the Wasuli, but a low, murderous outburst behind him stayed his footsteps. He whirled, saw Nyga plow into view. Ki-Gor balanced the heavy spear, gained the feel of the weapon. His arm swung back, steadied as he awaited the proper moment, then drove forward in the lashing throw of the dread Masai spearmen.

NO warrior in the entire Congo could match the power, the effortless skill of his throw. And he threw now to kill, to bring down this mountain of flesh. The spear cleft the air cleanly. Sunlight gleamed once on its bright point, and then with a jolting thud it hit its mark.

Nyga stumbled, slowed to a walk, stopped. A strange look twisted his distorted features. He made an odd gurgling sound and rivulets of blood started from his gaping mouth.

The spear stood straight out from the center of his chest. Only half the shaft was in view. The point had driven completely through his massive trunk, protruded redly from his back. Nyga stared down at the shaft and the strength went out of his legs. The monstrous figure slid to his knees.

Ki-Gor waited no longer. Without a backward glance, he went with long, quick strides toward Helene's prison. The long knife shone in his hand. His narrowed eyes were the eyes of a stalking lion, hypnotic in their searing intensity. His nostrils flared slightly at every breath.

This was the Ki-Gor of native legend, this man who went forward against unknown odds, one man unafraid against many. This was the White Lord of the Jungle, greatest warrior of the Congo, whose very name struck terror into his enemies, aroused courage and strength in his friends.

He came on silent feet to the entrance. He listened, placing the approximate locations of the two guards who chatted inside the door. Then quietly he caught hold of the door. It moved easily as he tried it, so with a sudden tug, he tore it open.

Ki-Gor was across the threshold in a leap. One startled guard looked up in time to see the blurred sweep of the White Lord's blade. It was the last sight of his life. The stroke severed his neck, sent him careening against his fellow in a pulsing geyser of blood.

The second guard swept up his spear to chop down this knife-wielding apparition, but the jerking corpse of his fellow struck him, fouled his spear. The White Lord bounded at him before he could recover. Ki-Gor's knife burned the air like a jagged bolt of lightning, stabbed thrice into the man's chest and belly.

Ki-Gor ripped the spear from the guard and ran forward. He glanced about him as he ran, his mouth tightening at this further evidence of Devere's cruelty. He was near the edge of the pit before the other guards grasped the meaning of his presence, realized he had cut down the two men at the door.

"Aaaaiiii," cried one. "It is Ki-Gor come to claim his mate." And there was a note of terror in his voice.

Then a harsh voice rose above the others, a voice of authority. It was the head guard, and his words struck the wavering blacks with the effect of a lash.

"Kill!" he cried. "Kill or be killed. Stop him or no man here will see another sun."

They came on then, slowly at first and then with the growing bravery of a pack. They came racing along the narrow ledge from their posts around the pit. There was no time for Ki-Gor to pick out Helene's figure from the milling, screaming mob below. But he knew she was there and Tembu George with her.

His foot caught against a rough surface. He tripped, fell to his knees. As he fell, he saw what caused him to stumble. It was the ladder which the guards used to climb in and out of the pit. Without wasting a moment, the quick-witted jungle man dropped his spear and knife, caught the ladder and with a powerful tug shoved it out and down.

A way of escape lay open for the prisoners below if only he could hold back the guards. The Wasuli converged on him in two groups, coming from opposite sides of the building, five in one bunch, three in the other.

KI-GOR snatched up his weapons, turned to face the three men who came from the left. His great-thewed legs braced, his right arm went back in a short, quick arc carrying the spear. Then with a catapult's driving power, he cast the long Wasuli spear. It thrummed a death song as it cleft the air at terrific speed.

A running guard screamed as the shaft lanced through his stomach. He leaned crazily as he ran near the runway's edge, then slid and fell in a twisting heap. The man directly behind him moved too fast to stop, so he leaped high to clear the fallen guard, but the spear Ki-Gor had thrown reared up from the dying Wasuli's belly. The second native's leg struck the shaft and he crashed on his face, rolled once and pitched headlong into the pit.

Ki-Gor's voice rose in the dread war-cry of the Masai, the chilling, blood cry which the fierce warriors utter when they close with their enemies. He was hurtling toward the one remaining native, straining to reach him before the man loosed his spear. The Wasuli, though, had no intention of letting Ki-Gor close with him, and his arm cocked in mid-stride for the cast.

Ki-Gor's slitted eyes fastened on the man's spear arm, while desperation urged him to his greatest effort. He knew he could not reach the Wasuli in time, but still he drove on. Certain death faced him if he halted, and if he must die, he intended to take the guard with him.

And then in the rushing span of a pulse beat, the White Lord made the one try that could save him. Too fast for the eye to follow, his red stained knife whipped up. Then it sang toward the native. Ki-Gor threw the knife with tremendous speed, threw almost instinctively, and the whirring blade cleft the air in its race to reach the Wasuli before he cast his spear.

The blade hammered into the black's chest even as he swung with the spear throw, as he delivered the final thrust of power into the shaft. Ki-Gor had struck too late to halt the native, but the knife's

stabbing drive, and the searing pain it sent flaring through the Wasuli, achieved the jungle man's purpose. Twisting under Ki-Gor's blow, the warrior bobbled his aim. The spear was diverted enough to send it blasting past Ki-Gor's right shoulder.

Ki-Gor slammed against the grey-faced guard, gave a surging push with his shoulders and the Wasuli reeled off the edge of the walk, fell screaming into the pit. The White Lord did not break his stride until he reached the dropped weapons of the first guard he had cut down. The man lay on his side with Ki-Gor's spear driven through his stomach, his eyes glazed in death.

With feline grace the White Lord picked up the spear and knife, spun to face the five remaining guards. His eyes were a blaze of gray fire, his lips a thin, firm line as he stood poised on the pit's edge. His bronzed body, naked but for a breech-clout, was tight-strung as a drawn arrow as he gauged the grim warriors, weighed his next move.

Far below, the milling prisoners looked up and saw the crouching white figure. For the first time since their imprisonment, they saw a man face Devere's cruel guards without fear. And a strange thing happened to those brutalized men, to those near-beasts with dim, fading memories of a time when they too were free and unafraid.

Silence fell over the pit. The snarls and half-mad screams of the prisoners dropped away as though at a signal. Every eye fastened on the White Lord. Then one man said the word. Another took it up. It swept—that magic word—over the watching mass like the crackle of flame over parched veldt.

"Ki-Gor! Ki-Gor! Ki-Gor!"

Again and again they said it. And the memories of the green jungle, of their home *kraals*, of the shadowed paths where men walked erect, grew and swelled strong and life-like in their tortured minds.

Louder and louder swelled the cry. Louder until the chant rose deafeningly. Louder until the sound rolled like thunder.

And high above them Ki-Gor heard the rising surge of their voices. He heard them call his name over and over, and through him flamed a strength that was more than his own. The running guards heard the

shattering chant and in their ears it was magnified even more for there was a terrible faith and hope and certainty in the thunder of those voices.

SENSITIVE as a jungle creature, Ki-Gor watched the guards, felt the involuntary fear which the sound loosed in them. He saw them falter as they passed the point where he had flung down the ladder. The battering emotion of the prisoners distracted them, filled them with a rush of misgivings.

And Ki-Gor in that moment launched his spear with blasting power at the tight pack of guards. He threw the spear and almost before it left his hand he was racing after it, pounding toward the center of the Wasuli.

They saw him flash into action, and with cries that went unheard in the tumult, two men cast their spears. But the White Lord was a twisting, turning target as he sped toward them. Ki-Gor's spear drove full into a guard's mouth, ripped through to tear away part of the next man's shoulder.

Then Ki-Gor was close against the first man, his knife whistling as he parried the guard's spear thrust, chopped through the shaft with a bone-shattering blow. The man swung with the broken shaft, but the dancing, shifting White Lord melted before the attack, swung back and under to slash a deep wound across the warrior's belly.

Fear and pain whipped the guard to greater effort, and despite his gashed stomach, he swung the length of wood with desperate quickness. The shaft caught Ki-Gor across the chest and he staggered back under the terrible blow. He fought to keep his feet, but the breath was gone from his lungs. His eyes blurred with dizzy nausea. His legs buckled and he fell to his knees.

The guard tried to finish the White Lord, raised the spear shaft to strike again, but the wash of blood from his wound swept away his strength. He trembled in sudden agony and collapsed. Through a mist, Ki-Gor saw the man fall, knew the other blacks would be on him in a second. He reared to his feet drunkenly, held erect through sheer will.

The Wasuli dashed at him, their grim faces lighting with the knowledge he was hurt. Ki-Gor raised his long knife awk-

wardly, struggling to clear the dizziness from his head, to see the men clearly. He swayed heavily, feet braced wide apart, knowing full well they would be on him before his strength returned.

Then slashing through the tumult came a fierce, nerve-tingling war cry. It was a voice of wrath and fury that rang above all else. And dimly behind the guard, Ki-Gor saw a huge black figure catapult from the top rung of the ladder, mount the edge of the pit. Almost in the same motion the giant black sent his spear at the Wasuli nearest Ki-Gor. The spear caught the man in the back, lifted him from his feet, threw him completely past the White Lord.

The other Wasuli wheeled at the abrupt emergence of this new enemy. He turned in time to see Tembu George, greatest of all the Masai, bound toward him. The Wasuli gaped at this fierce apparition from the pit, hesitated a moment too long, and the Masai Chieftain's knife chopped half his skull away.

Ki-Gor's eyes were clearing now and he saw Helene swing over the edge of the pit. Then behind her in a steady stream came the prisoners. The one Wasuli guard remaining alive, the man wounded in the shoulder by Ki-Gor's spear, lay moaning on the ground when the grotesque figures began clambering into view. With a scream of terror, he heaved to his feet, started to run toward the door. A snarling mass closed around him, bore him down, battered him into silence.

Tembu George started for Ki-Gor, but hearing Helene's glad cry, he stood aside. The red-haired girl ran to her mate, anxious as she suddenly saw the red welt across his chest. Her arms went around him, she pressed her face close against him.

"Oh, Ki-Gor, I never thought I'd see you again," she began, then halted. "But you're hurt! They've hurt you!"

He ran his hand over her soft hair, let it rest on the curve of her shoulder.

"I'm all right. They knocked the wind from me and loosened a few bones," he said, laughing to reassure her.

But his eyes were not laughing as they flicked over her, seeking the evidence he dreaded to find. Tembu George watched him, knew what he sought.

"Don't worry about us, Ki-Gor," the Masai Chieftain said. "Devere didn't touch

us and I was able to bluff those poor fellows in the pit."

More and more prisoners crowded out of the pit. They milled about excitedly, always watching Ki-Gor.

"We must start moving," the White Lord told Helene and Tembu George. "Devere's heard this noise and gathered his guards by now. It won't be easy to get away from here."

KI-GOR took a deep breath, shook his shoulders loose. His tremendous inner vitality already had restored his strength. The blow he took dazed him, but his rock-like chest muscles had cushioned the shock which would have crushed an average man. Years of extreme physical activity paid off now in his body's quick return to normal.

With a smile, Tembu George recovered two spears from the ground, handed one to Ki-Gor. After days of strain and horror in the pit, the Masai Chieftain stood with weapons in his hands, a strong friend to fight beside him, and he was content. He knew not how many Wasuli stood between him and freedom, and he did not care. Death in battle holds no fear for a Masai, nor do warriors of the Wasuli tribe.

"Stay close behind us, Helene," Ki-Gor said, pressing a knife into her hand.

"We go!" cried Tembu George, and there was a fierce joy in his voice.

Walking side by side, Tembu George and Ki-Gor forced a way through to the door, with Helene staying close at their heels. As they stepped outside, the mass of prisoners boiled out after them, pushing about them in an irregular mob. This action saved the trio's lives.

A wave of Wasuli, led by Devere and Kalido, swept toward the building. When they saw Ki-Gor and his slim mate, they gave a cry and loosed their spears. The mob of prisoners which rushed from the door, screened the jungle couple and Tembu George.

The spears struck with deadly effect, wounding and killing many in the crowd. The Wasuli shouted with triumph as they saw the unarmed prisoners fall, and they swept forward with their knives, sure in the knowledge they could beat these down-trodden brutes back into the pit.

But Ki-Gor leaped to the fore, and

with the maddened rush of bulls, the prisoners followed him. Their fear of the guards was gone, replaced by a burning desire to kill. With only their bare hands for fighting, the strange pack drove over their fallen comrades, raced at the Wasuli.

The brutes struck the line of warriors, and such was the shock of their clawing, tearing charge that the Wasuli reeled back before it. In sheer animal savagery they threw themselves on the guards, motivated by a hate born of the endless terror to which Devere and his men had subjected them. And though they died, they dragged Wasuli with them into death.

Yet flesh cannot stand against steel, and urged on by Devere and Kalido, the Wasuli closed their ranks and stood firm. The battle swirled and eddied, and then the thinning prisoners began to fall back. The guard's knives were too much, and though Ki-Gor and Tembu George cut a swath of death about them, they too had to retreat with the others or be surrounded.

Abruptly, the prisoners gave up the unequal struggle. They broke and ran in every direction, each one striving now to make good his own escape. When this happened, Tembu George stopped retreating, his manner showing he meant to fight and die where he was.

"There is still a chance," Helene said, pointing to the building close by where Devere had forced her to view the worst of his monsters. "Quick! Let's go in there."

They reached the door, dashed inside. Ki-Gor and Tembu George stopped in their tracks, stared about them unbelievably.

"Open the doors! Let them out," commanded Helene.

HURRIEDLY, the two men went down the long corridor, raising the bars which held shut each cell door, flinging every door wide. They understood what Helene planned. Some of the great beasts were too huge and sluggish to move, but most of them were excited by cries outside the building and paced about their cells. A few ventured from their cells before Ki-Gor and Tembu George had finished opening all the doors.

Two of the beasts began to fight, then others joined in and quickly the building rocked under the impact of struggling giants. Natives who had tried to follow the

trio into the building took one glance and fled. As the monsters careened closer to them, Tembu George opened the back door, led the way into the open air.

But as he stepped from the building, he cried a warning to his companions. Devere, Kalido and a band of Wasuli stood waiting. Stung by the instant contempt on Tembu George's face, Kalido's lips twisted in hate and he dove at the Masai Chieftain.

Tembu George gave half a step as he parried the knife thrust, then with cat-like agility he bent slightly and rocking forward, drove his blade through Kalido's throat. It happened so quickly, not one of Kalido's men had a chance to save him.

Ki-Gor and Helene were beside Tembu George then, and the three stood with their backs against the rough logs, ready for the rush of the Wasuli, Kalido's body lay on the ground before them, his blood spilling a crimson ring on the dark earth.

"Come in, dangoes," taunted Tembu George, "so you may follow your sneaking king."

Devere's face was livid with rage. These three had cost him trouble enough with a third of his guards dead, his experiments ruined. He swung the flat of the Wasuli knife he held on the guards' shoulders.

"Get them, you cowards," he screamed.

His words were drowned in the rumbling roar of the hideous giant that plunged from the building, stood blinking in the sunlight. The creature twisted his bulbous head as the scent of blood struck him. He saw the Wasuli warriors and made for them. The men turned and ran, and even Devere ran back a few steps. Then as the monster went by, Ki-Gor leaped at the doctor before the man gathered his wits.

Too late Devere realized he must face the White Lord alone. His face tightened and his mouth twitched. For a moment, it seemed he would try to run away. Then goaded by desperation, he threw caution to the winds, went to meet Ki-Gor, swinging his long Wasuli knife like a saber. Twice Ki-Gor parried the doctor's blows without trying to attack. Then as he did the same thing again, Tembu George frowned. But when on the fourth clash of the blade, Ki-Gor twisted his hand, sent Devere's knife singing through the air, the Masai leader smiled appreciatively.

"Cut him to ribbons," Tembu George

urged, feeling no mercy for the cruel white man.

Devere paled, realizing how close to death he was. Ki-Gor's features were utterly expressionless as he stood holding the razor-sharp blade an inch from the doctor's throat. Suddenly, Ki-Gor pitched the knife away.

Devere's eyes gleamed. The fool thought to beat him with his fists. Devere lashed out swiftly.

Ki-Gor shifted with lightning speed and his open palm smashed full in the doctor's face. The man pitched backward, his lips split and torn. As he jumped to his feet, he tried to kick the jungle man in the groin. Again he failed and again that rock-like hand exploded in his face. Ki-Gor smashed and battered Devere back and forth over the blood-spattered ground until the doctor fell flat, began to crawl whimpering.

There was the splintering crash of wood and another great beast heaved, wild-eyed and bellowing, from the building. Ki-Gor turned instantly from Devere to watch the beast, make certain Helene was safe. Devere, on the other hand crawled rapidly to where his knife had fallen.

Ki-Gor stood with his back to the doctor. Tembu George and Helene were stiffened against the building, watching the giant. Devere came painfully to his feet, started to run at the White Lord.

DEVERE'S action caught the monster's attention. With another roar, the beast charged the only thing in its vision that moved. It bore down on Devere with express train speed. The giant's huge, clawing hands snatched up the doctor, literally twisted him in half, tossed the broken body fifty feet away. Then the monster ran forward to stamp the last remnant of the man into the earth.

Helene gasped at the sickening sight and even Tembu George turned away. Ki-Gor recovered his knife lying a few feet away, and motioning to the two, he led the way toward the jungle. At first, it appeared they would go unobserved.

But Devere's order to capture Ki-Gor had been strict and his precautions thorough. A band of guards was thrown around the edge of the jungle with the command to hold their posts until the White Lord was caught.

Ki-Gor was almost on top of the hiding men before he discovered them. They swarmed from ambush, and as the trio turned back, they came racing after them.

"Keep going," Ki-Gor cried to Helene and Tembu George, and he swung around to delay the Wasuli as long as he could.

"We go only with you," answered Helene, and she pivoted with Tembu George to stand beside her mate.

The Wasuli came leaping from the jungle, knowing there was no further retreat for their quarry. Their knives gleamed in the sunlight as they brandished them wildly. They came in a rush, each one eager to be in at the kill. And their voices rang in the cruel warcry of the Wasuli.

Then only a few paces from the jungle, the running warriors began to tumble and fall. Their cries died gurgling in their throats.

Ki-Gor stared at the strange, mystifying scene. Tembu George's eyes widened, and his mouth dropped open. Where a minute before men ran triumphantly to the kill, only an irregular line of corpses lay.

"Ho! A good friend comes!" The familiar voice rang from the forest.

Ki-Gor and Helene looked at each other and a smile began to play at the corner of their mouths. Tembu George snapped his mouth closed, erased all surprise from his face.

A small figure stepped from behind a tree, strode importantly toward them. Behind the little man, pygmies began to swarm from cover. N'Geeso patted his blowgun, his eyes gleaming brightly.

"So once more, Ki-Gor, we pull this great elephant out of trouble," N'Geeso said, frowning disapprovingly at Tembu George. He pursed his lips, shook his head vigorously. "Had it not been for Helene, I would never have wasted my time trailing Kalido."

Tembu George, for once, made no reply to the little man's good natured taunts. He winked at Ki-Gor. This time N'Geeso had earned the right to crow, and thankful as well as amused, Tembu George did not mean to spoil the little chieftain's fun.

Ki-Gor slipped his arm around Helene, and smiling, they walked away, leaving N'Geeso to admonish his great friend.

Death-Plague of Mata-Gara

By
**JOHN
STARR**

The Eater of Souls began by stealth. But soon the bush shook to the endless, chilling roar of the Gimshai's juju-lion . . . as it brought death—and worse than death—to all in the jungle.

TONY WAYNE sensed a sudden menace in the jungle air. He could find no reason for the feeling, why he should be so abruptly conscious of death

and dead things. Sweeping his gaze from the verandah of his bungalow, his eyes traveled over the rows of grass huts which stood in the clearing. He saw nothing but



Wayne knew he had walked into a death trap.

a few naked black children playing among the huts, saw nothing disturbing among the trees and thick-growing vegetation of the almost impenetrable jungle that hemmed the clearing.

That was in the moment before N'glana and his crew of workmen came filing out of the short jungle road that led from the gold pits.

Wayne stiffened slightly. His rule was that none should leave the pits during working hours. Because of it, the black men—save N'glana—had been resentful, for it had been their habit to cease work any time to hunt or loaf. Mooli, a leader among them, had deserted camp only a few days, before. Others whispered of similar intentions.

Wayne stepped from the bungalow. Arms folded, he faced the men in the center of the native compound.

"Why have you left your pit?" he asked sharply.

Oddly, the men appeared more afraid than resentful. Even N'glana, the tall Zulu whose rare sense of responsibility made him so invaluable to Wayne, was visibly disturbed. Fear made the white of his eyes vivid in the tight-set ebony of his face.

"*Gimshai*, the Eater of Souls, has come into our pit," N'glana said. "*Bwana*, we are afraid he will snatch our souls, one by one, as we work there."

"Foolish old woman's talk!" replied Wayne in disgust. "N'glana, I never believed a brave man as thou—"

"The smell of death is there in the pit, *Bwana*—has been there for two suns, growling stronger as time has passed. Now we have doubts no longer." N'glana's nostrils dilated as he sniffed. "*Wah*, the wind even brings a trace of the vile smell all the way to our *kraal*."

Wayne became aware of it finally—the faint odor of the dead. He realized it was this he had noted in the air a moment before, but had not recognized it. His sun-browned face hardened; his voice became curt.

"Let us return to the pit," he said.

"*Aaiiee!*" A wail of fright rose from the black workers. They huddled sullenly. "We will not return there to lose our lives. *Gimshai* hath returned to Mata-Gara

again, as it was said he would. We must flee—"

"I will return to the pit with you, *Bwana*," spoke N'glana, with simple dignity.

Wayne stared at him. He knew N'glana's fear was great as that of his companions, yet the Zulu was willing to return to the pit with him.

"You are my friend, and let none ever step on your shadow," Wayne said, and led the way out of the *kraal* and into the dank, shadowy roadway that led to the close-by gold pit. With every step the stench became heavier, more nauseating. N'glana drew close to the white man. It was as if he felt Wayne could protect him by his nearness.

THE gold pit was shallow hollow in the jungle floor. The death-reek was intense. Yet Wayne saw nothing unusual in the diggings.

"Wait here, N'glana," he said at last. "I will go down and look."

Nervousness tightened N'glana's thick lips. It seemed that he intended to stop, or at least warn the white man against his reckless plan. He said nothing, standing motionless, tense, while he watched Wayne descend.

Wayne moved slowly, threading noiselessly among the shapeless boulders that were strewn about the pit. Then abruptly he stopped, eyes narrowing. The answer to the vile odor was before him—the horribly-mangled corpse of a black native lying wedged behind one of the large boulders.

The jungle is not kind to the dead. The two-day-old corpse was already in an advanced stage of putrefaction. Studying the body a moment, he finally returned to the pit's rim and rejoined the apprehensive N'glana.

"There is no evil jungle spirit in the pit," he said reassuringly. "I have seen the truth."

"But the stench, *Bwana*—"

"Come with me and I will show you," Wayne told him. "There is no danger."

N'glana hesitated. The Zulu was puzzled, unsure. When he followed the white man down into the pit at last, his fingers were tight and ready on the handle of his half-drawn throwing knife.

He fell back a step, his face shocked and bleak, as Wayne pointed out the rotting corpse to him.

"Mooli!" he cried. "It is the worker we thought had deserted us a few suns past!"

"Wah," nodded Wayne. "It is what remains of Mooli. He was clawed and struck by a lion, and he fell down into this pit. His body lay hidden from your sight, lodged behind this great stone."

"Clawed by a lion . . .?" N'glana's voice was a horrified gasp. Instinctively, he gestured in tribal counter-magic. "*Gimshai* and his cursed lion-monster hath returned then after all!"

"You speak child-chatter," scoffed Wayne. "Mooli's death was an accident frequent to this lion-country of Mata-Gara. A man is foolish who wanders this bush alone at night."

"I have heard stories, *Bwana!*" Fear-filled excitement harshened N'glana's tones. "*Gimshai* has returned to bring terror upon Mata-Gara as in the past. The Eater of Souls begins—as this—by stealth. Yet soon this bush will shake to the endless roaring of *Gimshai's* juju-lion. It will bring death—and yet worse than death—on all of us!"

"Silence, N'glana," ordered Wayne in a sharp voice. "I never thought you would believe the wild stories fools tell at cooking fires. Go now to the bungalow. Return with your men. We must bury Mooli."

N'glana eyed him tensely. He said no more, but turned away to fetch the others.

They returned with him. In a numbed silence, they tended to the putrifying corpse and buried it in the jungle growths not far from the pit. And the hot, moist breeze that had carried the stench of death as far as the bungalow clearing, now washed the odor away. The air became clear of the dead. Only the familiar smells of the jungle remained.

WAYNE talked to the men then—long and earnestly—until they saw the wisdom of his reasoning and returned to their labors in the gold pit. Being clawed to death by a lion, as he had said earlier, was not an uncommon occurrence in Mata-Gara.

But Wayne wasn't entirely convinced himself when he returned to his bungalow.

He had made a close examination of the claw marks that had torn the corpse and it was obvious Mooli had been struck down by some tremendous beast. *The claw spread had been fully three times that of the largest lion he had ever seen . . .*

Tony Wayne had lived most of his thirty-five years in Africa. He had made and lost more than one fortune in his career of prospecting and mining in the primitive Congo areas, and it was in a coast town that he heard about the fabulous Mata-Gara claims. He had a glimpse of the government record regarding the mines, and was intrigued when it was said the mines couldn't be worked and were up for sale at a pittance. Someone else was bidding on the mines, so he borrowed money and beat out this competitor.

"You're sunk, Tony," a friend told him afterward. "Machinery can't even be flown into that wild region, and you'll have to rely on natives to dig for you. Worse, it's juju country. They got a very potent brand of black magic there that's made other owners fail. It'll stop you, too."

"We'll see," grinned Wayne. "I know my jungle, Mister. If the gold's there, I'll get it out . . ."

It wasn't until he got to Leopoldville on the first leg of his journey to Mata-Gara that he got his first concrete information about what might be in store for him. He ran into DuVal there. DuVal was a blocky little Frenchman he knew from way back.

"*Sacre nom de nom!*" gasped DuVal, when he learned where Wayne was headed. "You're in for hell. The mines are in bad shape. The blacks are surly. And there's that queer juju to fight against. Wayne, you'd be better off if you sold those holdings for whatever you can get."

"You seem to know a lot about it, DuVal."

"I do. Davis, the last owner, hired me to work for him. I know the kind of hell that's happened there."

Wayne stared. "What d'you mean—hell?"

"Juju!" hissed the Frenchman. "Natives there say *Gimshai*, the Eater of Souls, protects that bush from all white men. *Gimshai* and his big juju lion is supposed to finish off any white that comes there. Things shaped up for Davis till the juju lion began its infernal bellowing. It

licked Davis like it licked others before him—and like it's going to lick you. *Nom du Diable*, you should wash your hands of those mines—and quick."

"But somebody's going to come along and beat those jungle ghosts," said Wayne doggedly. "I want to be sure that somebody is me . . ."

They did a lot of talking that night. A lot of drinking, too. Before the evening was over, and that was close to dawn, Wayne had gotten DuVal's promise to go along with him. He offered DuVal a big share in the mines—but only in the event the situation was black as the little Frenchman had painted, and that they overcame the perils together.

"I must have swilled too much cognac last night," DuVal growled to Wayne the next morning. He had a pounding head. Remorse, too, it seemed. "Only a fool would return to Mata-Gara. But I stick to my word. If I signed the agreement with you, I'll go through with it."

"I promise you no regrets," laughed Wayne. "We'll make a good team together . . ."

SO it was they set out together for the wild jungles of Mata-Gara. They traveled with one other companion—N'glana, the Zulu, who had been highly recommended to Wayne as a guide and all-round capable bush-man. And they reached their destination swiftly and without mishap.

The mines were located along a river, standing ten miles apart from each other. Number One was a hillside tunnel, while the second mine was a series of three shallow pits set in about the thickest jungle Wayne had ever seen. His first inspection of the mines proved two things—that they were in as terrible shape as DuVal had said, and that the mines were rich with ore.

"I'm putting you, DuVal, in charge of Mine Number One," he said. "I'll see what I can do at the pits."

Which was the beginning of a month of hell. It would have been difficult enough getting the mines in order with experienced white crews. The natives that peopled the district were lazy and sullen, knowing little of civilized methods and customs. But Wayne and DuVal were too much of

jungle veterans to pamper the blacks as Davis, the former owner, had done. They drove the workers without mercy. And by the end of thirty days, the mines were operating somewhat efficiently, giving promise of ultimate results.

And now Wayne had found the corpse in the pit.

He stood a long while on the bungalow, puffing silently at his pipe, his eyes studying the quiet native huts in the clearing before him. Inwardly, he cursed himself for imagining crazy thoughts about the tremendous claw-marks he'd seen on Mooli's torn remains. No lion was large enough to have a paw like that. The only answer was that the swelling of the corpse had distended the skin, thus enlarging what had been normal claw-marks.

"That's the way it was," he muttered to himself. "I'm sure of it."

But he wasn't sure. And with uncertainty came worry. The only sensible thing, it seemed, would be to go and talk to DuVal, who had been through this before.

He took his rifle in the crook of his arm and left his bungalow. He headed along a crooked jungle trail, passed beneath some moss-draped baobab trees, until he came to the place where some half-dozen native canoes were drawn up on the bank of the murky-watered river. Disturbed apes scolded him from the trees, rousing some tiny sunbirds which flushed across the river like flashing iridescent light.

Tony Wayne shoved one of the canoes into the river. He leaped into it and stroked with the paddle, sending the light craft swiftly down-stream.

His was the automatic, untiring stroke of a man accustomed to jungle travel. Distance melted away behind him, and it was not long before he came into the lush hills of tangled bush where Mine Number One was located.

It was then that death rode the air again. One moment the gentle breeze sent the sweet scent of *maheena* blooms drifting across the river. In the next, all this fragrance was suddenly blotted out by the terrible stench of putrifying dead bodies.

The change was so unnatural and horrible a chill rippled down Wayne's spine. He shook off his wild thoughts, slowed his canoe, circling the river as he searched the shores for signs of a rotting corpse.

There was no corpse in the vicinity.

He was convinced of it when he resumed his course toward the mine, for the stench did not lessen in the air. It was like an evil pall over the jungle, and he found himself thinking again of *Gimshai*, the awful native god of Death which they call the Eater of Souls.

Finally he paddled up to the flat river bank where other canoes were beached, leaped out and pulled his craft up beside them. Then he set out along the well-trodden trail that led to the hillside where the mine was located.

A small native village stood at the base of the low hill. Reaching there, he was sickened by the stench of death in the air. Horror and fear hung over the settlement. Black men walked the *kraal* nervously, their labors in the mine forgotten. Fear had tightened their faces, and they held their clenched hands close to their spears.

DuVal came out to meet Wayne. The face of the blocky little Frenchman was as grim and tight-set as the features of his ebony workmen.

"Well?" said Wayne.

"*Nom du Diable!*" cried DuVal. "It has come like a sudden thunderbolt. Yesterday, all was serene and happy. Now twenty-five men lay sick to death of some queer fever that has struck at us overnight. And that is not the worst. *Gimshai*—"

"We can't believe native mumbo-jumbo!" gritted Wayne. "There is some logical explanation for all that is happening. Someone is—"

DuVal held up his hand. "Wait, Wayne. I want you to see something else first before you argue the point. Come with me and I'll show you."

Wayne eyed him a long minute, then wordlessly began following the little Frenchman. Silent natives stepped out of the way as DuVal walked from the *kraal*, following a narrow overgrown trail which led off to the south. It was the trail that led to the village water hole.

DuVal stopped at the water hole to point out the ghastly thing that lay beside it. It was a twisted corpse of a black man who had obviously been mauled by a lion. And for a nerve-crawling moment, Wayne stared at the horribly

torn body. Claw-marks were plain on the corpse—claw-marks larger than any ordinary lion would make.

"If you still have doubt, examine this," DuVal said in a thick tone. He stooped down and pointed at the marks in the boggy earth alongside the water hole.

Wayne's blood turned to ice in his veins as he studied the marks. They were the tracks of a gigantic lion—one that must have been the size of a water buffalo.

"Now do you disbelieve?" DuVal asked him. "Now do you see why I begged you to sell these mines? It's something a white man can't lick. Jungle magic that—"

"Jungle magic or hell itself isn't going to lick me!" Wayne told him in a cold voice. His lean face was granite-hard, challenging. "I can fight, too, and don't give a damn whether it's men or devils against me. DuVal, I intend to get these mines going, or—"

His voice broke off as a lion bellowed from the nearby bush. It was a hideous shattering din like the familiar warning cry of the king of beasts—*except that it was a dozen times louder than any lion's roar!*

"There it is! The roar of *Gimshai's* cursed juju lion!" shouted DuVal in a shaking voice. "We better get out of this Mata-Gara bush before *Gimshai* brings us to our ends!"

Wayne hardly heard the Frenchman's frenzied cries. A great rage swept him, and he swung his rifle from his shoulder. He levered a cartridge into the chamber.

DuVal stared. "*Diable*, what are you . . . ?"

"I'm going hunting," Wayne growled, and grimly set off in the direction of the roaring lion. With no thought of personal danger he plunged into the tangled undergrowth of the jungle in search of the fearsome beast.

As he cautiously stalked through the wilderness, the lion momentarily stilled its loud roaring. He sensed that the beast had become aware of him. But he was wrong. The roar of the lion sounded again, this time from a distance south of him. Cursing, he turned in that direction.

His one passion was to get face to face with the awful lion and slay it. The beast, though, seemed to elude him, its roaring coming first on one side of him, then upon the other. Yet Wayne kept relentlessly on

its trail, his Winchester poised and ready in his sweaty fingers.

For a long while he kept on, until all at once he noticed the lion was a distance from him, roaring way back from the vicinity where he had started his search. He became furious with angry frustration. It was uncanny how a lion could shift its position so swiftly. Lions ordinarily didn't—

The realization chilled him that perhaps the natives were right. Perhaps this lion was not a living thing, but something conjured up by the dreadful *Gimshai*!

Yet he knew it was only his frenzied anger that was making him think such thoughts. He turned and trudged back the distance to the mine. And as he walked, he was taunted by the distant challenge of the huge lion.

HE did not resume the hunt upon his return to the mine. The blacks stood in groups, watching him in fearful silence as he entered their *kraal*. DuVal was waiting there, too, and Wayne walked grimly up to him.

"I couldn't get near the lion," he said in a strained, quiet tone. "Now let me examine your sick."

DuVal said nothing. Soberly he took Wayne on a round of the huts, showing him the stricken men. Two of them, plainly, were dying. It was a vomiting disease that afflicted them, accompanied by fever. Wayne had seen nothing like it before. But he said nothing about it. Nor did he comment on the strange fact that sickness had come with that unexplainable stench of the dead that was in the air.

"Treat them the best you can, DuVal. Use what drugs you have. It's all we can do," he said finally, and walked abruptly out into the sunshine again. The roar of the lion reverberated the bush once more, and the black natives began wailing weird prayers to their gods.

Wayne hardly listened to any of this. He was concerned over the other mine. If things were happening here, trouble must be brewing up-river, too. He went at a jogging run to his canoe. He shoved it out to the current as he leaped in, and began paddling with swift, powerful strokes.

It was a relief to get out of the foul

odors that hung over the mine. Yet, some time later when he drew close to the other mine, his jaw went hard—because that same vile, sickening death-stench was there also.

Worse, that horrible lion beast seemed to have preceded him there, for the great noise of its roaring was chilling the bush.

N'glana was waiting at the river bank when Wayne pulled his canoe up. The big Zulu stood motionless, his weapons in his hands. Peculiarly, the fear that had so characterized him earlier was absent from his dark face.

"I want speech with thee, *Bwana*," he said.

"I know about what's happening," Wayne snapped irritably. "You're going to tell me that I was wrong—that *Gimshai* and his lion-beast is stalking this bushland for us."

"I know, only that it is the will of the gods that we fight or die. But we cannot do battle alone. *Bwana*, I know of a brave tribe that lives not a great march from here. I can go and fetch them here to fight beside thee."

Wayne turned on him skeptically. "Do they fear *Gimshai*, the Eater of Souls?"

"Wah, all jungle people fear *Gimshai*."

"Then they would be useless here. They would fear death as the others," Wayne said in disgust, and walked up the trail to the clearing.

And new rage rose within him when he came striding into the native *kraal*. Black mine workmen were assembled there. They had deserted their labors in the pits.

"What is the reason for this?" he demanded loudly as he strode among them. "Why are you not in the pits?"

One of them faced him sullenly and said, "The smell of death is around us. The juju lion walks the bush, ready to obey *Gimshai's* every command."

"Wah. Return to your work lest trouble start."

The black man did not move. "Trouble will start if we do. It is our plan to stay out of the pits—to avoid all white-man work. *Gimshai* will not harm us then."

Wayne's lips tightened. His narrowed eyes studied the tense, sullen company before him. They were jungle savages, always dangerous as they were unpredictable.

"I command you, return into the pits."

"The dead cannot command, *Bwana!*" cried the black. He leaped toward Wayne, his knife flashing from his girdle. There was murder in his blazing, distended gaze.

Wayne moved with fluid speed, firing over the heads of the blacks. The rifle thundered like ordnance in the *kraal*, stopped the men in their tracks for a moment. Wayne stood unafraid before them, his face cold.

"You and your numbers could overpower me, but some of you will die with me," he said. "Come forward now if you want to die. Next time, I shoot to kill."

The black men stood undecided, wavering.

"Killing the *bwana* will bring us nothing," calmly spoke the voice of N'glana from behind Wayne. "Nor will it aid us to stay out of the pits. Let us return there. I have faith in our *bwana*. He will prevent our deaths. He alone can prevent our deaths."

For a long minute, all stood in a grim tableau. Then a few men began walking toward the mine road. Others followed, until all began trudging back toward the gold pits.

N'glana's words, Wayne knew, hadn't brought about this obedience. Rather, it was that the men knew Wayne would kill some of them before he fell. Each of the simple-minded blacks had submitted only in the craven fear that he might be one of them who would die with the *bwana*.

Wayne breathed in relief. He turned to the Zulu and said, "I am in your debt, good N'glana. I will not forget what you have done for me."

N'glana made no reply. Silently he walked past the white man and headed for the pits.

Wayne turned to his bungalow, sat for a long while on the verandah. The death-stench was an invisible fog that permeated everything. Distantly came the roaring of that huge lion. He kept his rifle beside him because he sensed trouble. If it did not come from this mysterious menace that hovered over the mine, it would rise from the fear-frenzied natives themselves.

The day gradually spent itself. With the falling of darkness, a handful of native workers emerged from the pits road and entered the *kraal*. Puzzled, Wayne went

down to the cooking fires and asked them about the others.

"They are not returning," one of the blacks said. "They have fled into the bush, believing it offers more safety than thee, *Bwana.*"

Wayne hid his disturbed feelings behind an emotionless face. He asked, "What of N'glana? I do not see the Zulu among you."

"He went with them," the speaker said over his shoulder as he and his companions stepped toward their huts. "The Zulu lied before when he said he trusted you."

Wayne stared after them, scowling. With these few faithful workmen, he'd be handicapped; the mine would fall to ruin again.

And DuVal would have similar desertions at the other diggings. More men would die horribly.

It would mean the end to this mining venture. Except that Tony Wayne wasn't a person to give in to defeat. He would not submit until he was beaten to hands and knees and literally trampled to death. It was his nature.

A full moon rose later, leering down on Mata-Gara like a cruel, laughing god and spreading a pale, emotionless light over the brooding jungle-land. The huge lion bellowed in the distance, dimming the chorus of other lions by its nerve-chilling vociferation. Behind this came the occasional ghostly cry of leopards, the muted shrieks of hyenas and lemurs.

The *kraal* itself throbbed to the muffled, funereal beat of tom-toms. Native women wailed in dreadful monotones, streaking their bodies with ashes. They chanted sing-song entreaties to their gods for safekeeping.

SO weird and fantastic was all this, Wayne sensed a queer foreboding, the frightening sensation that nothing was before him except death. Desperately he strove to thrust the insisting premonition from his mind.

He lay himself down on his cot inside the bungalow—not to sleep, but to think over all the fantastic ramifications of his heartbreaking predicament with the hope of finding a solution. Yet his weariness manifested itself, and he fell sound asleep. It was no pleasant rest. He dreamed of a

horrible monster that pursued him, meaning to devour his very soul. . . .

With a start, he awakened. Dazed by the horror of his dreams, he did not move for a moment. He had slept long. The *kraal* was quiet now. Even the damnable roaring of that huge lion was stilled. The moon had half-crossed the sky, its bright rays painting silver squares on the floor beside the windows.

Then, abruptly, he realized that he was not alone in the room. The snuffled sound of breathing came to him; the soft slithering of naked feet moving cautiously toward his cot. And when he rolled his eyes to the right, he caught a glimpse of the intruder.

It was one of the naked blacks who had deserted from the pits, and Wayne's muscles tightened when he saw the horrible device the man grasped in his hands. The war-club was huge, heavy, and its wide, knobbed end was fitted with razor-sharp, hooked knives. Blows with this inhuman weapon, Wayne realized, would simulate lion claw-marks of gigantic size.

The black man was almost beside the cot. He caught his snuffling breath. With a hard, muscular stroke, he swept the huge war-club downward.

But Wayne had moved as fast as any human could, rolling from the cot as the club crashed down. The awful hooked knives raked through the canvas of the cot, the club catching in the cloth momentarily. And Wayne was diving across the cot before the cursing murderer could dislodge his weapon, raining hard, flailing fists upon the black man.

Grunting from the blows, the native whirled, dashed in mad, frantic flight from the bungalow. Wayne chased after him through the moon-bright darkness. But the black man got beyond the clearing and the jungle swallowed him up.

Wayne stood a moment at the jungle's edge, then went striding back to the bungalow to examine the fallen war-club. It cemented into his mind the truth that this mystery that had befallen the mines was not supernatural, but vicious and sinister trickery.

Still, what reason could be behind this hellishness? What motive could these natives have that prompted them into brutally slaying people of their own *kraal*?

An inkling of the truth crept into his startled mind then. First he rejected the possibility scornfully. Nevertheless, as he reviewed the past in his mind, he saw that he could not be wrong. And it brought great rage upon him—the will to bring to an end this horrible business.

But how to begin? What move . . . ?

As if in answer to his very pondering, the loud, tremendous roaring rose again from deep in the bush. It was as though *Gimshai*, the Eater of Souls, were hurling a taunting challenge at this puny, defiant white man.

IT was a challenge that Tony Wayne accepted. His face hard and grim, he hurried out of the bungalow, carrying his rifle in the crook of his arm. He gave no thought to the added perils one finds in the bush at night, but plunged purposefully into the thick tangle of the jungle.

The challenging lion-roar kept on as Wayne fought his way through frondiferous undergrowth, growing louder with every forward step. The moon-brightness gave him good visibility in the dark-shadowed bush. Noiseless, alert to signs on all sides of him, he moved anxiously toward the chilling sound of that tremendous lion-roaring.

He stopped at last, his lean body tight-drawn, ready, the rifle poised in his hands. The lion-roaring was directly in front of him, tremendous-sounding as the din of a cavern waterfall.

He crept slowly forward, and less than ten paces took him to the edge of a grassy, moonlighted glade. A naked black man was seated cross-legged in the center of the glade, and Wayne recognized him as another of his deserters. The native had a huge war-drum fastened to the earth and was pulling, over and over, upon the rosined cord that was fastened to the drumhead. The drum vibrated with awful sound, and the earth was a soundboard that turned the noise into a gigantic roaring.

Tony Wayne stepped silently into the glade and was almost beside the native before the black man saw him. Abruptly the black ceased pulling at the drum-cord, and the following silence was intense, almost frightening by contrast.

Wayne gestured with his rifle. "Stand up!"

The native eyed him, then slowly rose. No fear stood on his black face, merely sullen insolence.

"What do you think you can do, *Bwana*?" the native sneered.

"I'm going to use you," Wayne snarled at him. "I'm going to use you to bring DuVal's dirty plot crashing down on his head."

"*You?*" The native laughed mockingly.

An angry retort leaped to Wayne's lips, only to wither to a horrified silence when suddenly he caught the reason behind the black's taunting mockery. The inky shadows on either side of the glade transformed themselves into the shapes of men—naked, screaming black men who raced out, brandishing spears and knives, their widened eyes bright in the moonlight with blood-lust.

Wayne fell back a step, whipping his rifle up to his shoulder. He knew he had walked into a death-trap. But he did not intend to die alone.

Yet he fired not one shot. In the exciting moment, he was unthinking that men had stolen into the glade behind him as well. A spear-handle struck him brutally on the head, knocking him to his knees. Then the spear struck a second time, and all his awareness was abruptly blotted out by a black, hot silence . . .

The next moment, so it seemed, he found himself standing erect again. With the return of awareness, he realized he was leaning against the slanting bole of an old tree, his arms about the trunk, his wrists bound together with *tonga* cords. Black natives stood in a sullen circle about him, watching. They watched, too, the blocky little Frenchman who was regarding Wayne coldly.

"You've been a fool, Wayne," DuVal said. "I gave you a dozen chances to get out from under, but you insisted on being stubborn about it."

Wayne eyed the blacks, all men who had been his workers at the mines. They were hard, ignorant savages, incapable of such intricate machinations as had taken place—which was why he had suspected DuVal.

"Seems to me, DuVal," he said, "you want the mines pretty bad to commit murder."

"The mines are rightfully mine," hissed

DuVal. "I told a prospector about the gold here, but he cheated me out of it when he uncovered the ore. That's why I started trouble. A man's got a right fighting for his own property."

"THE gold's driven you insane, you mean," grunted Wayne. "By some means you got this group of blacks to work with you. You capitalized on the jungle fear of *Gimshai*, manufactured horror effects, having these renegade blacks kill men of their own tribe to heighten your effects."

"They killed only men they hated, and the apparently deathly sick men you saw at the other mines are up and around now—the result of a harmless root poison. They have all been paid well—for the lion-noise and the death-stench as well. There is little smoke when you burn dried *segaini* leaves, but the stench is like rotting corpses, so intense it spreads over the countryside."

"All this so owner after owner of the mines will give up. Yes, so the price of the mines will come down to where you can get them for a pittance."

DuVal growled. "I *did* get the price down, but you outbid me and beat me out of the mines. That's why I waited for you in Leopoldville, why I let you talk me into accompanying you. I wanted to see personally that you did not keep the mines. But you've been stubborn. Which was why I sent the man over to kill you with the claw-club. When that failed, I had the lion-noise created. You suspected the truth and would naturally follow the noise, and fall into my trap."

"So you can murder me in cold blood!"

"No one is committing murder. Let no man touch the *bwana* lest he die. Wah, it is my warning to all."

Everyone whirled at the sound of this loud, commanding voice that spoke from behind them in the glade. Standing alone, magnificent, was the towering black figure of N'glana.

"Loose the *bwana*," he commanded.

"N'glana is but one man and you are many!" cried DuVal loudly. "Strike him down! Kill the Zulu!"

The Frenchman's words broke down his black's hesitancy. "*Bulala! Kill!*" they screamed, and flooded in a wild, furious stream toward the tall motionless Zulu.

Still N'glana did not move. And as before, the shadows of the glade became alive again, and a horde of warriors from some other tribe closed in on every side. Without ruth or mercy, spears and war-clubs flashed as the tribesmen fell upon DuVal's murderers and slew them.

DuVal was terror-stricken at this sudden, unexpected attack. He turned and tried to flee, but was knocked down and dragged back cringing.

"Earlier today I overheard two of these jackals whispering in the pit," N'glana said as he loosened Wayne from the tree. "From their talk it made me believe all the mystery was man-made mischief. That is why I said to thee that we must get aid from this other friendly tribe. When you refused, I saw nothing except for me to go for help regardless. I left at the same time these jackals deserted your pits, and returned to the *kraal* in time to see you rush out into the bush. We followed you here and saw what was taking place."

Wayne was incredulous. "Why didn't you tell me what you overheard in the pits? Why—"

"You are a strong, mighty *bwana*, but stubborn as *tembu* himself. I feared you would not believe. And I wanted these warriors behind me so I could prove the

evil that was in progress under the guise of magic. I believed—"

Screaming, DuVal ripped himself from the tribesmen who restrained him. He raced wildly for the jungle.

"Stop, DuVal!" Wayne shouted. "You can't get away!"

And the Frenchman did not get away. N'glana, it seemed, barely moved, so effortless did he loft the spear he was gripping. The spear flashed in the moonlight, thudded sickeningly into DuVal's back, impaling him.

"It is justice, *Bwana*. He murdered many men of my race," solemnly said the Zulu. "Come now, let us return to the *kraal* with our good tidings."

"No man has a greater friend than thou, O N'glana," said Wayne fervently. "I am humble before thee."

Thus it was they set out through the jungle for the *kraal*, leaving the dead behind them for the *assvoels*. The bush was strangely quiet, save for the drone of insects, the croak of tree-frogs, and the occasional challenging roar of a lion in the distance. It was a lazy peace, a serenity that belongs to the African jungle-land when all is well with its good people.

The terrors of *Gimshai*, the Eater of Souls, was gone from Mata-Gara.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933 of JUNGLE STORIES MAGAZINE, published quarterly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1945.

State of New York, County of New York, ss.: Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared T. T. Scott, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the JUNGLE STORIES MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Glen-Kel Publishing Co., Inc., 670 Fifth Avenue, New York 19, N. Y. Editor, None; Managing Editor, None; Business Manager, T. T. Scott, 670 Fifth Avenue, New York 19, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) Glen-Kel Publishing Company, Inc., 670 Fifth Avenue, New York 19, N. Y. J. G. Scott, 670 Fifth Avenue, New York 19, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None.

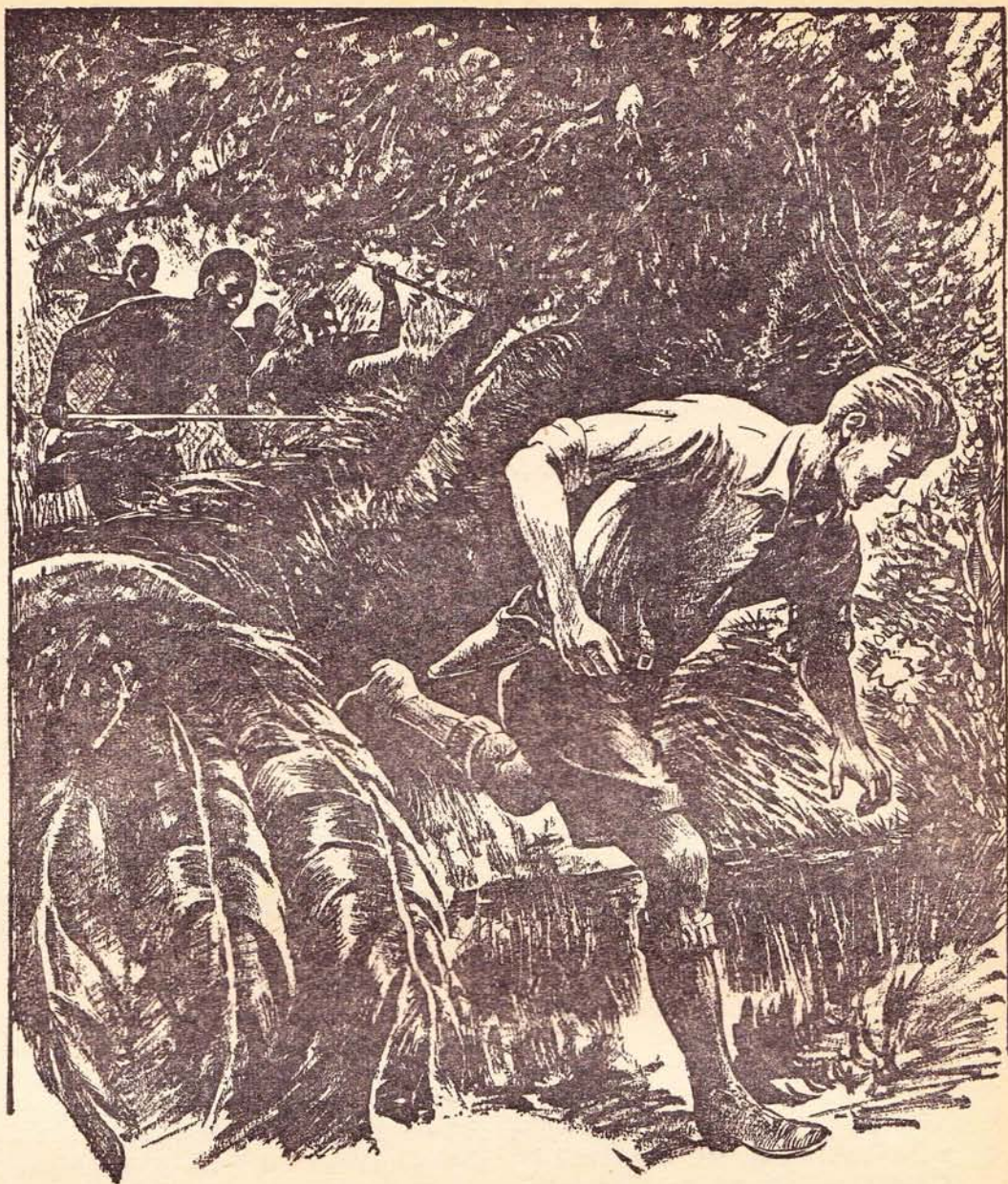
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5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the twelve months preceding the date shown above is (This information is required from daily publications only.)

(Signed) T. T. Scott,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 22nd day of September, 1945.

W. B. BULLOCK,
Notary Public,
(My commission expires Feb. 4, 1947.)



The Jungle of Charred Corpses

By PAUL SELONKE

Wild and frenzied screams cut the jungle night, and Nyua's stench of death stood in the air. Kirk's anxiety turned to awful dread. Bwala, Chief of the Gun-talis, had called upon his fire-god—and now all white men in the land would die.

A RIFLE spoke out of the tangled fronds that stood like a green barrier alongside the dark tree-tunnel of the trail. It spoke not with the customary quiet-shattering report, but with

hardly more than a whispered cough, winging its ruthless bullet toward a defenseless ebon target. The black man screamed, flung up his arms, as the slug tore into his naked breast. He collapsed into the trail,

his innocent life blotted out by a merciless hand.

His two hunting companions whirled in horror and amazement; bent down over him. And after they saw how the man had died, red hate blazed within their hearts.

"The White Juju!" they cried. "The flaming spear of the white man that kills without any sound!"

Nervous fear mingled with their rage. Their rage, though, was the stronger, and they began frenziedly beating through the nearby fronds, *assegais* poised, searching for this murderer who was killing their hunters with a gun that made no sound. They found nothing. They *knew* they would find nothing. This awful slayer was a white man's juju. A juju ghost, they believed, was invisible as the air they breathed.

The blacks, both tall, magnificently-proportioned fighting men, were hunters of the Guntali tribe which ruled this steaming wilderness of Tembu-Loma by the power of their arms, and by their strange and terrible magic. Fear of the supernatural stood alive on their faces when they returned to their fallen brother. They hastily constructed a litter and carried the dead man down the trail to their nearby village.

The village was a large circle of grass-thatched huts. The huts were grouped about a round, barren compound, where towered a large stone image of Nyua, their powerful ancestral fire-god. It was a hideous, crude sculpture of red stone, and in its malignant, unblinking gaze brooded a sullen, evil menace that chilled the hearts of all men who looked upon it.

An old crone in the compound saw the hunters coming down into the village with their ghastly burden, and shrilled out in excitement, pointing toward them. Her cry brought Guntali men and women hurrying from their huts. They milled around the hunters, their superstitious fears drowned out by their raging cries for vengeance. The *kraal* became a churning mass of black naked bodies. Angry shouts fused into one gigantic roar that seemed to reverberate against the shimmering heat of the coppery African sky.

The hunters trudged solemnly forward through this confusion. They laid the dead

man down at last beside the base of the great idol of Nyua. And as they did, the tall figure of Bwala, king of the Guntalis, loomed up within this frenzied throng.

BWALLA was dressed with the naked simplicity of his people. His strangely intelligent features were tight-set, cold, without any trace of the insane fury of the others. Bitterness stood like a gray cloud in his keen, steady gaze as he looked down upon the bloody form of the slain hunter.

"O King, the white men have brought their juju curse upon us for a reason!" one warrior shouted at him. "They mean to drive us from our land so it can become their own!"

"We must drive them out of our country to save ourselves!" another screamed, wildly brandishing his spear. "Our weapons cry to run red with their cursed blood!"

Bwala raised his hand for quiet. He shook his head and said, "Open warfare against white men will bring only disaster unto our people."

The blood-hungry, inflamed throng on all sides of him stared in wonder and surprise. One of them in the rear cried, "Is it that our king is afraid when our ranks outnumber these enemies as a man's fingers outnumber his nose?"

"Our enemies have hosts of white warriors camped at the Great Water beyond our bush," replied Bwala, "all of them armed with flaming spears. Once we strike, these warriors would be called to aid the whites, and it would be *our* blood that would dye the trails of our country."

"We would rather *die* than be driven out of our homes!" a warrior shrilled angrily.

"None of us *will* die, for we have a power even greater than white men," Bwala told him. "We will tell *Bwana* Kirk, the leader of all white men in our land, that he has two hands of suns to remove his people from this brush. Otherwise we will call upon our Great Protector for assistance." And he raised his hand and pointed grimly up at the hideous idol that towered over the village.

All eyes turned up to look at this ancestor god. A fearful, awed hush settled over everyone. And Bwala's voice boomed out like a knell of doom for their enemies.

"You saw, not long past, when we were the weaker and the N'glanas the stronger



The rifle spat lead and fire and Bori died.

people of this bush. You saw the N'glanas persecuting us with their cruelty and how I held rites that summoned Nyua out of his holy grave to aid us. You saw, also, how the stench of Nyua's swamp tomb entered the N'glana *kraal*. N'glana warriors were burned to death by fire that did not scorch the earth at their feet. Plagues and sickness struck at them, until they were reduced to a handful and scattered to the corners of this bush.

"That," the king concluded bitterly, "is what will befall all whites who do not depart our land. I have long revered *Bwana* Kirk and his golden-haired wife. I believe in all the good things they gave to us. But I see now that this was all trickery. They mean to do us evil—not good—and desire possession of this land that was ours since the ancient day when Nyua was our first king."

He turned to a stolid warrior beside him. "Kunato, you told me that three suns past you saw *Bwana* Kirk trekking the bush near here. Go now and find him and tell him all this I have said. All white men must depart from this bush or endure the wrath of Nyua. Tell him further that if his juju of the silent flaming spear strikes at us again during these two hands of suns, I will summon forth Nyua at once to strike at all that is his. *Wah*, I have spoken."

The warrior turned then and hurried away.

Bwalla watched him depart, then trudged heavily back toward his hut, bitterness dulling the whole of his smooth ebon face. It was the bitterness of a man who was crushed and disillusioned that his dearest friends—as Kirk and his golden-haired wife had been—had turned so evilly against him and his people.

II

HIGH NOON, two days later, Marty Kirk was at his productive tin mine deep in the heart of Tembu-Loma. It was his regular periodic visit for a conference with Joe Grimm, his mine manager, and that moment he was preparing to depart on his trek back to his settlement and the white-washed bungalow, where Jane, his wife, was waiting his return, two days' journey to the north.

Marty Kirk was a lean, lank American, red-haired and capable-looking. He was the man who had made the first explorations of this wild inland territory, ultimately developing this tin deposit and inviting other white men to prospect and develop the rich ore deposits. And because he was the logical man for the task, the Governor-General had appointed him Commissioner of Tembu-Loma.

He and Jane had done many things for the district, even taking the N'glanas under their wing after the fierce tribe's trouble with the Guntalis, educating them, turning them into mine workmen, and training the more apt into a company of riflemen—the "unofficial soldiers" of his settlement.

He was assembled with these riflemen in the workmen settlement of the mine. Joe Grimm, the stocky, stiff-spined Austrian manager, was beside him, talking. Bori, the intelligent, rather sharp-witted N'glana chief, was supervising the departure, for he was Kirk's headman. Drawn up behind Kirk, waiting, were eight N'glanas—all hunters—who were deeply devoted to him. They were Lakeeto, his son Gawai, and six other young N'glanas who were Gawai's close companions.

Then in that moment of bustle and activity, a stunned silence abruptly fell over the vicinity. The N'glanas stood in hushed groups, staring toward the north edge of the small jungle basin where the mine was located.

"What in hell's wrong?" spoke up Joe Grimm. "Why are the men—"

"Look," said Kirk, pointing. "A Guntali warrior's entered the basin over there and is coming toward us."

"So there is! I thought you had an agreement with Bwalla that no Guntalis come near this mine?"

"I have, and I know Bwalla wouldn't go back on his word unless something is wrong," muttered Kirk.

In the charged quiet that hung over the humid air, he saw the warrior advance nearer and he recognized him—a Guntalis named Kunato.

"Kunato," he said in Swahili when the warrior stepped before him, "why do you come to this forbidden place?"

"I come to warn you out of this bush," Kunato answered. "We have learned all white men are enemies, and that your

tongue is forked as that of *Ginzina*, the serpent."

Kirk's brown angular jaw tightened. He asked evenly, "Can it be that friend turns against friend?"

"Friendship between us is ended," Kunato said. And he told him of the soundless rifleman who was slaying Guntali hunters from ambush, and of Bwala's terrible warning to all white men.

KIRK was angered, shocked, learning that someone was murdering innocent natives by a rifle fitted with a silencer.

"This is no murder by ghosts, Kunato," he said desperately. "It is plain that one of the white men in Tembu-Loma—by stealth unknown to me until now—is committing these killings for some personal motive. Therefore, go back and inform Bwala that this moment I am sending out messengers to all the white men camps, instructing the whites to assemble at once at my official settlement.

"I will question all and learn who the killer is. When this is known, I will bring the slayer to your *kraal* and execute him before all your people. In addition, I will make payments in goods and privileges to make up for the loss of your brave, innocent hunters. That is my solemn promise."

Kunato smirked. "I will return and tell my king this, but I know he will not believe your promises. All men know that there is no human alive who can shoot one of your flaming spears without the terrible noise it makes."

He gestured with his hand. "But remember this, *Bwana*—if any other hunter is slain by this noiseless White Juju within the two hands of suns promised you, great Bwala will call Nyua from his holy grave at once, and the wrath of our powerful god will descend upon all that is yours."

Without further speech, he turned, trotting away. He vanished into the grove that partially circled the *kraal* of the N'glana mine workmen.

Kirk heard the moans of fear and horror from the assembled N'glanas. Even Chief Bori shared this terror. Fierce fighting man though he was, he cringed beside Kirk.

"We *must* depart from this bush," he wailed, "or sicknesses and death by a fire that strikes invisibly out of the very air will befall us. My tribe suffered horribly

when Bwala called up Nyua against us. It will happen now to thee."

Joe Grimm, the mine manager, snorted with disgust. He said, "Bwala merely used tricks against you, Bori, and you believed it magic. No man is powerful enough to raise the ancient dead from their graves."

Hopelessness dulled Bori's eyes. "Do not scoff. Heed rather the power of Nyua to bring suffering and destruction to all of us. There is nothing for us to do but trek from this land."

"You talk like a child-man," Grimm reproached him. Scowling, he turned to Kirk. "What do you make of this crazy business, Marty?"

"I never lock my storehouses at my settlement," Kirk replied. "The white men who are prospecting around here are free to take any supplies, food, or arms that they need, because Jane and I are interested in their success. We want to see Tembu-Loma developed into a fine, civilized colony."

"I don't follow you," frowned Grimm.

"It's simply this. I received a rifle silencer as a gift from an explorer I guided up the Congo, a few years ago. That silencer was in the gun cabinet of one of the storehouses. Plainly, one of these men has taken the silencer and is using it to murder innocent Guntalis."

Grimm gasped noisily. "Which man d'you think—"

"Any of them could have taken it. All of them come to the settlement often—and just as often use my storehouses to fill their personal needs." Kirk's voice became hard, brittle. "And one of them is a murderer. He has some dirty reason for wanting to drive the Guntalis to revolt by killing their hunters with a silenced rifle."

"Who the devil would want to do that?"

"That's a question we've got to answer within ten days—or we'll be in for hell or worse."

Grimm jerked. "Marty, you aren't crazy enough to believe that Bwala can hokuspokus a corpse from the grave!"

"I don't know what to think. But I feel that whatever happens won't be pleasant. I was here in Tembu-Loma when the Nyua curse was placed on the N'glanas. I saw how an epidemic of strange sicknesses

gripped their *kraal*, and saw even stranger murders for which I still have no logical explanation."

"Meaning we've got to discover the identity of this murderer and prove his guilt to Bwalla's satisfaction." Grimm's face was tight, grave. "Can we do this in ten days?"

"We'll do our best," said Kirk. "I'll send runners to the camps of these men at once. All the camps are within a day's trek of my settlement, and if we set out there at once the men should be assembled when we arrive."

"We? You mean I should go with you?"

"You are one man in this jungle whom I trust. I will need your help in this business," nodded Kirk. He turned sharply to Bori, the N'glana chief, so that fleet runners could be dispatched at once.

III

AFTER the runners were chosen and sent on, Kirk started his two-day march toward his settlement and home. Chief Bori trudged in the lead of the party. The white men came next, with Lakeeto, his son, Gawai, and Gawai's six young hunter companions pacing behind them. The remainder of the blacks marched at the rear.

Kirk walked silently, thinking of Jane, his wife, waiting back there at the settlement. She was an admirer of Bwalla and believed the king's tribe were their friends. It wasn't going to be easy telling her that the Guntalis had turned against them and had become their enemies.

Hours ground by, and the jungle thinned. The trail turned into a ridge of soggy mud, hemmed on both sides by stagnant scum-green water dotted with barren, broken trees that were webbed with ugly festoons of sickly-gray moss. The swamp was a morass of crocodiles, hideous horned lizards, and deadly quicksands.

Finally the fulsome stench of the swamp assailed them, and the N'glanas bunched together in fear and quickened their pace. For this was the Swamp of Nyua.

The swamp was where the Guntali ancestor-god was entombed, and every black man of Tembu-Loma believed that the nauseating stench exuded from the ancient

grave itself. It made them shun the dreadful place.

The soggy trail debouched into a small, flat plateau. In the center of this unnaturally barren high ground was the pile of weathered rocks that marked Nyua's grave—Nyua, the father of the Guntali tribe, who had died more than a century before. As the party hurried by, Kirk's eyes were magnetically drawn toward the aged grave.

He had come through here the last time the risen Nyua had prowled this jungle and had seen how the rocks of the grave had been thrown aside, and only a yawning hole had marked the place where the grave had been. And getting later to the N'glana *kraal*, it seemed the stench of the swamp had followed him, for the village was rank with it. A queer plague of sicknesses gripped the tribe. Also, he saw how sentinels of the village had literally been consumed by fire at their posts, while not a blade of grass about them had been scorched.

And after the horrible business came to an end, he had seen Nyua's tomb again, the rocks sealing it as before, a grave that appeared as though it had never been disturbed these many years.

He could find no answer to these things, despite that he knew King Bawalla was clever enough to resort to tricks and artifices to fan superstitious minds, both among his own people and their enemies. This horror had been too real, too unexplainable.

They got past the swamp at last, and the more comforting tangle of the jungle wilderness closed in around them again. They trekked till dark, camped, and were on the trail again before dawn, Kirk goading them to speed.

And the morning of the next day they reached the densely-vegetated slope that marked the southern boundary of his settlement.

They descended down into the settlement, a long, narrow, tree-shaded glen, lined on both sides with native huts and storehouses, while at the east end of it stood Kirk's trim, whitewashed bungalow, which was his official residence as District Commissioner of Tembu-Loma.

Kirk scowled when they got there, for there was no sign of the white men whom

he had summoned to meet him at this place. Nor had the runners arrived yet.

"I don't get this," he growled at Grimm. "They should have beat us here by a good eight to ten hours. It makes me wonder—"

His voice dried in his throat as muffled screams, wild and frenzied, knifed out of his whitewashed bungalow.

WITH a snarling curse he knocked aside two N'glanas near him in his frantic haste to get to the residence.

His anxiety turned to awful dread as he got nearer the bungalow, for the smell of the swamp—Nyua's stench of death—stood in the air. He loped across the verandah, then stopped stock-still on the threshold of the door, gagging on that vile death-smell that made the air of the bungalow almost poisonous.

Barely aware of the stench, his eyes were riveted upon one of his devoted houseboys, who was sitting dead on the bench inside the door. The houseboy's body was charred, burned as if by an intense flame—yet the wall beside him and the bench incredibly were not even scorched!

"Jane! Jane!" Kirk cried, running into the house. But there was no answer—no sign of her anywhere. And getting to the bedroom, he found the bed in a turmoil, the sheets soiled by the handprints of bony fingers that had been besmirched with clay. And there was no clay in the vicinity. The only clay in Tembu-Loma was found in the Swamp of Nyua!

Jane had been carried away into the jungle even as he had stood in the settlement—carried away by an age-old corpse that had risen from its ancient grave!

A cry of rage welling in his throat, he ran out to the company of fear-numbered N'glanas who were assembled outside the bungalow. He shouted, "Search the bush about the settlement! Jane has been kidnapped!"

It was the beginning of a wild search. But Kirk was soon to call it off. There was no sign of her anywhere. It was as though the very earth had swallowed her up.

Why, though, had she been carried away? Why hadn't she been murdered in the same gruesome manner, like that houseboy?

He headed back toward the bungalow. And in his mind he could still hear the warning voice of Kunato. The Guntali warrior had said, ". . . if any other hunter is slain by this noiseless White Juju within the two hands of suns promised you, great Bwalla will call Nyua from his holy grave at once, and the wrath of our powerful god will descend upon all that is yours."

It was apparent that another hunter had recently died by the silenced gun, and King Bwalla had called up Nyua to doom all whites in this jungle. But why had Jane been struck at first? Why had she been singled out of all the white people in Tembu-Loma?

Kirk found Grimm in the bungalow.

"The other houseboy is in the kitchen, burned to death the same as the first," the mine manager said thickly. He wrung his hands. "Marty, I can't understand it. My common sense tells me it's some devilish trickery on King Bwalla's part. But the way it looks—I can't make myself believe that an age-old corpse—"

Kirk didn't listen to him. He walked past Grimm as though the man did not even exist. . . .

A HALF HOUR later, he was in the center of the glen, facing his collection of N'glanas, who were grouped frightened and numbed before him. They stared in awe at their master. He was like one who had lost his soul—cold, hard-eyed, without a trace of friendliness and compassion on his brown rock-like face.

"The white men have not come here as I instructed," he said tonelessly. "Neither have the runners I sent for them. Something has happened to them, or to the runners before they could reach the white man camps. And seeing how the Guntalis have struck at us, we cannot pause now to try and find which white man has brought this misery upon our bush. We must fight the Guntali ancestor-god curse without this weapon I had hoped to have.

"No dead can rise out of the grave," he went on, his voice rising slightly. "Whatever happened to your tribe long ago was Guntali trickery, even as this taking of my dear wife was Guntali trickery. But I can match King Bwalla for cleverness. I can be stronger than Nyua!"

"No man is stronger than Nyua," Bori,

the N'glana chief, replied hollowly. "Bwana, our fate is written. All we can do is leave this accursed place."

"Meaning we have water in our bodies in place of blood?" snapped Kirk. "Bori, to give in to Bwalla's tricks would lose us everything. And I do not mean to lose my dear wife—not while she still lives and breathes!"

His hard, burning gaze swept over the staring black men. His voice was bleak, commanding, terrible.

"Men of N'glana," he said, "it is my plan that we march by stealth upon the *kraal* of the Guntalis, for I know that it is in their village where I can find Jane. In the cover of darkness, we will steal her from them. And when they pursue us back here, white soldiers will by that time be here in the glen to subdue them."

"Wait a minute!" broke in Joe Grimm. "We can't stand up against the whole Guntali tribe with only this handful of N'glanas. We'll be slaughtered like lice."

"We *will* stand up against them," Kirk told him. "And it is my order to you that you return to the mine and arm the other N'glanas—your workmen—who this minute are there. You will wait there in readiness in case of our need."

He swung away from the mine manager and pressed a written letter into the hand of a lithe young N'glana who was famed for his speed and endurance.

"Run down out of this country to the boat-landing where the river turns away from Tembu-Loma," he ordered. "You will be able to borrow a canoe at the trading post there. Go directly to the Governor-General's residence when you reach the coast. Give him this letter, and he will send a large company of soldiers back here with you."

The young N'glana bobbed his head, tucked the message into his clout-girdle and started fleetly away. In a moment, the jungle swallowed him up.

Chief Bori was looking upon Kirk, a grave expression on his fierce, intelligent black face.

"Bwana, you cannot do this," he said. "To make us trek now into the bush will be our deaths."

"Is it not better to die on the trail, rather than waiting for Bwalla to murder us from ambush?" Kirk retorted harshly. He

stepped nearer him, added dangerously: "I am your master. You must do as I command. If any man disobeys me, it is within my power to drive him out of this settlement—*alone!*"

Chief Bori licked his thick lips. "I am only remembering what happened to our people. Nyua is powerful."

"I am powerful, too, Bori, and you must believe in my power. If trouble should confront us when we go forth into the bush, I have the means of creating such magic that the Guntalis will grovel on their faces in fear. I promise to make them—and even Nyua—powerless before us."

Kirk's voice rang out sharply, aweing the black men by its terrible intensity. Then he turned away from them. With sure, lithe steps, he headed back toward the residence.

IV

THEY set off that afternoon and trekked all the following day, and the next. Noon of that third day found Marty Kirk and his grimly silent company of N'glanas moving along the trail deep in the brooding heart of Tembu-Loma.

Thoughts of lovely golden-haired Jane, a girl who had been born in Africa and capably had trekked side by side with him in the most perilous trails, tortured Kirk. He could think of nothing except her rescue. It was like a scourge across his naked flesh.

Yet he was bewildered that the Guntalis, through Nyua, would strike first at Jane. He was equally bewildered that she had been taken away instead of being murdered in some hideous fashion. It almost seemed part of some kind of coldly calculated plan.

What *kind* of plan? Was it that Bwalla wanted to lure him into the jungle, exactly as he was doing? Did Bwalla believe him author of the white man "juju" that was striking down the Guntali hunters?

Then for the first time since Jane had been taken away, a lucid thought cut through the feverish confusion of his mind. He recalled the Fire Sacrifice of Nyua—an old Guntali ritual custom which he and the Governor-General were striving to stamp out. The recollection sent a shudder of horror rippling down his spine.

The Guntalis had called upon their terrible god to drive out all white men. Therefore it would be natural that they would offer sacrifice to Nyua's name. And with Jane chosen as the enemy victim to be used in this ceremony which took place only at the first quarter of the moon. . . .

Kirk swung to Bori, who paced stolidly at his side. He asked, "When will we see the first quarter of the moon . . .

"The dark after tomorrow's sun, *Bwana*," Bori told him.

Kirk's face tightened. It made him sure. A bit frantic, too. It would be the next night before they reached the Guntali *kraal*—and to rescue Jane, they would have to get there before the ceremony could begin.

"We must press on with haste, O Chief. We must reach the Guntali village when the sun is still in the sky. That is my command."

Bori eyed him levelly, shrugged and said, "Only a miracle will bring us there so speedily." And he went the length of their column, shouting that the pace be doubled.

Kirk watched, somewhat cheered at the willingness of these N'glanas. He had anticipated trouble from them—that they would not march with him into the dangers of the Guntali country. Yet they had come willingly.

That is, all of them save Gawai, Lakeeto's young warrior son, and those six other young N'glanas who were his close hunting companions. They were visibly worried, plainly keyed up over the fact that they had been ordered out to do battle against an enemy no one could see.

Kirk blamed it upon their youth. Still, he was wondering if it was his promise of magic greater than that of Bwalla that had made the older men willing. His magic consisted of a few boxes of rockets and fireworks which he had brought up from the Coast once and had never used. Fireworks always struck terror into the hearts of black men who had never before seen them.

This magic was likely to be of no avail if they reached the Guntali *kraal* during the afternoon. The peril of a daylight rescue was great.

At length, they passed through the foul-stenched swamp and across the small plateau where Nyua's grave was located.

5—Jungle Stories—Spring

And the grave, once again, was as it had been that time Kirk looked upon it when Nyua had been called forth to prey upon the N'glanas. The heavy stones of the grave were strewn about, and a yawning hole gaped in the clay where the ancestor-god's bones ordinarily rested.

Gawai cried out in horror and began running along the trail to get free of the dreadful place. His six companions, and most of the older N'glanas, were filled with equal terror and hastened their pace.

It was a disordered, frantic flight that took the party swiftly into the jungle wilderness beyond the swamp. The N'glanas caught a grip on their fears then and slowed down to a walk. It relieved Kirk, too, that they were so quickly out of that swamp. The odors of the jungle seemed clean beside that ghastly smell of the dead.

But all at once everyone realized that the stench had followed them. Out of the jungle air about them, like some formless vapor, the miasma of Nyua rose up again—faint at first, but increasing in foul intensity as moments passed. It gave re-birth to the fear-frenzies of the N'glanas. Lakeeto and a few of the other braver men gripped weapons ready in their hands as their eyes searched the bush about them for an enemy they could not see.

The voice of Gawai was a thin wail of terror.

"We are doomed!" he cried. "Nyua is pursuing us! Death will strike us before we get near the Guntali *kraal*!"

THEN, almost miraculously, the stench dwindled away, and only the more endurable odors of the jungle remained. It was so incredible that the entire company stood in wonder.

"Nyua passed by and did not see us," Chief Bori observed solemnly. "It is our luck—"

"It was not luck," quickly spoke up Kirk. "I carry on my person a juju that is stronger than Nyua. Nyua is afraid—even as Bwalla and the Guntalis will be afraid when we meet them. My juju is all-powerful."

He could see the sharp effect of his words upon the N'glanas, the strange way they looked upon him in that instant. By swift thinking he had saved his party from

mutiny. Awe, momentarily, seemed to take the place of terror.

The party resumed their journey once more. As they went on their silent way, the lethargic *dreeing* of the insects, the sharp, child-like chatter of monkeys in the treetops was an anodyne to their overwrought nerves.

There was no peace, however, in the mind of Marty Kirk. Behind his impassive face was concern and wonder. The stench, rising up from nowhere in the trail and vanishing again, didn't seem a natural thing.

He had to fight back the mad feeling growing within him that the dead actually could be called up from the grave. Worse, some inner voice kept whispering that new nerve-shaking terrors were waiting them farther along the trail.

But it seemed that he was wrong. They made good time the remainder of the day, and there was no trace of Nyua, nor of the odor of death. It raised the spirits of the blacks, even of Gawai and his youthful companions, and none spoke of fear and danger any longer, but of the good speed they had made that day. It was as though they felt secure under the protection of this mysterious, powerful juju their white leader had spoken about.

Kirk made camp a short distance off the trail. It was a donga hemmed with baobab and ironwood trees and flowering shrubs that would screen their cooking fire from the eyes of any possible prowling bands of Guntalis—a carefully chosen camping spot halfway between the trail and the old Maragoona water hole.

As a repast of *posho* and strips of wild pig was started, Gawai, perhaps to atone for his display of cowardice, picked up the goatskin and offered to go for water. And with his departure, the tired men sat in a circle about the fire, discoursing little between each other. A prowling lion coughed its challenge deep in the bush, and it was answered by the wild cry of a hyena. None of the men seemed to hear it. They seemed content to sit and rest.

After a while, Lakeeto stood up.

"What is keeping Gawai, *Bwana*?" he said to Kirk. "It is not natural that my man-son would tarry like this in a dangerous bush."

Kirk started up. He realized Gawai had

been gone the better part of a half hour on a mission that should have taken no more than five minutes.

"*Wah*, he has been gone too long," he agreed.

"*Bwana*, it might be best if we went to the water hole and joined him," remarked Bori. A queer expression lay on his fire-lighted ebony face. "He might have stumbled in the darkness and hurt himself."

So Kirk, Lakeeto, and Bori left the fireside and filed through the jungle toward the Maragoona.

They did not find Gawai anywhere along the trail to the water hole. They found him at the water hole itself, and the youthful hunter-warrior was dead.

KIRK shuddered when they saw by the starlight how horribly Gawai had died. His body was a charred mass. Gawai had literally been consumed by fire—yet by a fire that did not even scorch the grass where he lay.

"*Nyua!*" whispered Bori in awe. "He has been following us and has fallen upon poor Gawai to consume him with his devilish spirit-fire!"

Kirk did not reply, because Lakeeto spoke in a thickly muttered tone then, choked and terrible to hear.

"My son—my man-child!" And Lakeeto bent down and picked the charred body up tenderly in his arms. He turned and began walking back to the camp with his grisly burden.

Neither Kirk nor Bori said a word. They picked up the filled goatskin of water and followed Lakeeto.

Every man in the camp rose in horror as they saw what Lakeeto carried into the light of the fire. Gone was their sense of security, and in its place was wailing terror and fear. They milled about Kirk, beseeching that they turn back before all met their deaths by this mysterious, all-consuming fire of Nyua.

"You have been wrong!" they cried at him. "Your juju is not as powerful as Nyua, for this cruel Guntali god has struck at us once again!"

"My juju is *still* all-powerful," Kirk told them. "It protects me and those about me. It did not protect Gawai when he went forth alone into the bush."

"That is true," spoke Lakeeto. "Now I

will go forth to bury my dead, and I will return again because the dead do not disturb the dead."

He was a strangely magnificent figure as he stepped fearlessly into the peril of the haunted bush, and no man tried to stop him. And after the hunter was gone, Kirk noted that the remaining N'glanas had control of their frantic fear. The logic of his argument, backed by Lakeeto, seemed to have some effect. But they were no longer relaxed, but watchful of the jungle about them.

Lakeeto returned later without his son and sat apart, heavy with grief, as the others ate of the meal. At last every man lay down beside the fire to get some rest.

There was much stirring in the long hours following, for sleep under the circumstances was not easy. Kirk heard all this. Sleep was a stranger to him, because his mind was so alive with disturbing thoughts—of Jane in the cruel grip of the Guntalis, and of this spine-chilling mystery of the corpse of a cruel jungle god rising up to do such evil work. At last, though, he did sleep—much more soundly than he had expected.

He awakened suddenly, his head tortured by a sharp headache. Dawn grayed the jungle. And he coughed, choking on a foul, acrid odor that made him forget the pain of his head. He chilled to the awful realization that the stench of Nyua was thick upon the camp.

Angrily, a little frightened at the weird phenomenon, he sat up and threw some tindery branches upon the red embers of the fire. Some of the N'glanas wakened as he did. They cried out at the ghastly smell of death. And the entire camp stirred.

That is, all except those six young companions of Gawai's. And the rising flames of the kindled fire revealed why they did not rise. They were dead—charred, horribly burned corpses. Each had been burned to death while lying side by side with Kirk and the remaining N'glanas!

KIRK stared in incredulous horror. Up to that moment he had striven to convince himself that all that had happened had been Guntali trickery. But the Guntalis could not enter a sleeping camp, burning six men to death while the others slept. It hinted of what Kirk did not and could

not believe—that the terrible Nyua was an actuality!

The N'glanas were in a frenzy of terror that he could not control. They milled about the donga in the wild fear that at any instant Nyua would return to also slay them with this mysterious spirit-fire.

It was only through the efforts of Chief Bori that the men were gotten under control. Bori then turned to Kirk and said, "Your juju—like all jujus we have tried—is powerless against Nyua. We cannot go on. We do not care to die in this horrible way as have our companions."

Kirk's eyes turned grim, burning, but he said nothing to Bori and gestured Lakeeto up to his side.

"Lakeeto," he said. "Go to *Bwana Grimm* at my mine and tell him to march upon the Guntali *kraal* and join us at the cross-trail beside the river. There is yet a way we can defeat cursed Nyua, for I still have another plan."

"It will be done," nodded Lakeeto. With the spontaneity natural to him, he picked up his weapons and plunged into the jungle, setting off for the mine, which was not too far distant from that place.

The remaining men stood in a sullen group.

"Pick up your burdens," Kirk said to them. "We are proceeding toward the Guntali *kraal*. We will meet *Bwana Grimm* there. As I told Lakeeto, I have another plan."

Chief Bori moved nearer Kirk. All the friendliness was gone from him. A stubborn sneer was on his black face.

"Plans and numbers mean nothing against Nyua," he said. "We are not fools. We know that death is waiting in this jungle for all of us. There is nothing for us to do but get out of Tembu-Loma as quickly as we are able."

Kirk's features were rock-hard, unreadable. He had no new plan of action. In fact, he was as shaken by these queer events as they. Yet Jane, he was sure, was being held at the Guntali *kraal* as a sacrifice victim. While he still could lift a hand against man or ghou, he would do his utmost to save her from a ghastly fate.

"You and your men, Bori, are under my orders," he said harshly. "Obey me, or else you will be punished."

"No orders can detain us," Bori retorted.

"We mean to turn back and get out of this accursed place."

Fury inflamed Kirk, also desperation, for Jane's life was in peril. He whipped up the heavy pistol that he carried on his hip.

"You are obeying my commands!" he cried. "If any of you dare—"

The N'glanas surged at him in a brutal mass. The pistol was knocked from his grasp. Cursing, fighting, he strove to battle against these frenzied black men—until a rifle stock caught him a hard glancing blow on the forehead.

He fell senseless beside the campfire.

V

KIRK felt as though he were struggling in a tunnel of velvet darkness that had no ending. But at last he became aware of the *dreeing* of the jungle insects, the sound of chattering monkeys scolding one another, and the muted cathedral choir of golden-throated birds. Dazedly he pulled himself to his knees and looked about the vegetation-hemmed donga.

He did not know how much time had passed, but the day was fully light now, and he saw that he was alone in the camp, with only the gruesome charred remains of the dead men beside him. Even his guns and equipment had been taken away by the deserting N'glanas.

The full impact of his frightening predicament—that a ruthless, peril-filled jungle still lay before him, and he was without food or weapons—shook his numbed, aching brain. And if he did not reach the Guntali village before dark fell that evening, Jane would die by torture.

For a moment, he cursed the N'glanas—yet he could imagine the depths of their fear that had brought them to leave him in this place to die so that they might preserve their own lives. But it bothered him that Chief Bori—so intelligent, despite his inborn savagery, with reasoning equal to white men—should so cruelly turn against him, too. He had always felt Bori would remain loyal to him in any circumstances—as he knew Lakeeto would.

Lakeeto! Recollection of the faithful hunter and the mission he had gone on raised Kirk's dwindled hope. Joe Grimm, with his men, might even at this moment

be marching toward the Guntali *kraal*. And when he met them . . .

It left him a fighting chance to rescue Jane, and his eagerness to get on sent him staggering out of the donga toward the trail. Much of his grogginess was gone after he reached the trail, and he trekked ahead at a trot.

Dogged desperation goaded him, and as he pressed on he watched for signs of the evil curse of Nyua to strike at him in some devilish way or another. Oddly, no manner of new trouble confronted him. It was as though the cruel jungle god had turned from him to follow the N'glanas.

He was still pondering over the startling fact some hours past noon as he trekked nearer and nearer to Bwalla's stronghold. Until all at once he heard the sound of chanting voices in the trail before him. He recognized the chant—the hunting song of the Guntalis.

He flung himself wildly into the bush beside the trail and hunched there. Breathless, he watched a party of six Guntali warriors file past.

It told him he was perilously close to their village now. He would have to watch himself, for capture would defeat any opportunity of saving Jane.

Presently, with infinite caution, he emerged from the damp, ferny undergrowth and re-entered the trail. He was wondering about Grimm—if the mine manager had gotten into the vicinity yet.

And then there was a crashing in the undergrowth beside the trail near him. He jerked, spun wildly around. But it was no Guntali warrior that came lunging out of the fronds. It was Lakeeto.

Kirk gasped when he saw him. Lakeeto was staggering and spent. His broad, heaving chest was a mass of crimson, and insects covered the blood like a grayish mat.

"Lakeeto!" Kirk blurted, and caught hold of the black hunter to steady him. "Lakeeto, what . . .?"

Lakeeto's sweat-dripping body was trembling. The black man had to struggle to speak. And when he found his voice, it was no more than a gasping, painful whisper.

"Bwana! I have learned—the truth. Nyua is nothing. Your dearest companion is a murderer—a betrayer—" His voice broke off, his knees sagging beneath his

weight. He fell to the ground and lay horribly motionless.

"Lakeeto!" cried Kirk, stooping down to him. And then he saw. The faithful black hunter was dead.

And he saw more. The wound in Lakeeto's breast was that of a rifle bullet.

KIRK straightened up, his brown face bleak. It meant that Lakeeto had not been slain by a Guntali. Nor was it credible that one of the N'glanas had shot him. Kirk was convinced that the bullet had come from a white man's gun—the silenced gun of the same vicious white murderer who had been slaying the Guntali hunters for some personal reason.

And Lakeeto had said the murderer was Kirk's dearest companion, a betrayer. Who could—

Before Kirk could reason this out, the six Guntali hunters leaped from the bush on all sides of him. They were greatly angered and fell upon him without mercy. He was bound with strips of tonga bark, and dazed and bruised was dragged up the trail in the direction of their village.

Being taken at last to their circular village, the people of Guntali milled round him as he was dragged to the base of the huge, grotesque idol of Nyua which stood in the center of their compound. They jeered and spit on him, until, all at once, their naked ranks opened up a path for the tall, stalwart black man who came striding up among them. It was Bwala, their king.

The Guntalis stood motionless, silent, as Bwala stepped alongside of Kirk and stared down at him. Bitterness and hate lay in the king's steady gaze.

"I am a just man, *Bwana*," he said. "I have not forgotten the good you and your golden-haired wife have more than once done for my people. Therefore, when another of my hunters fell before the noiseless flaming spear of your ghost-demon, I did not call forth Nyua as I threatened. Nor did I when a second hunter fell. But today, when a third of my hunters was slain by your ghost-demon, my patience was at an end.

"I instructed my hunters to search the bush and find a person of white skin so that we might have a victim for the Ceremony of Fire which will bring Nyua out

of his holy grave. The victim they captured is you—and that is good, because you are the leader of all white men in this country. It will be through your death that all whites will suffer and die by the wrath of Nyua for the wrongs they have done unto our tribe."

Kirk stared up at Bwala, his mind a whirlpool of wild thinking. Nyua was supposedly still secure in his grave—yet the grave actually was a yawning hole and the terrible horrors of the ancestor-god were abroad in Tembu-Loma. Jane, plainly, had not been captured by the Guntalis and taken here, because then the hunters would not have been sent out to search for a victim. And Lakeeto, going to enlist Joe Grimm's aid, had been shot to death, but dying had managed to reach Kirk to say, "*I have learned the truth. Nyua is nothing. Your dearest companion is a murderer—a betrayer—*"

It sent the truth screaming through Kirk's brain for the first time.

GREED can drive men till they become inhuman beasts, and greed obviously lay behind all the evil that had befallen Tembu-Loma.

"Listen to me, People of Guntali," he cried desperately. "I have seen the horrors of Nyua stalking this country, for his grave is empty. I have seen men die of fire that does not burn the grass at their feet. It is not Nyua's work, however, because Bwala has not called your great god forth. It is the work of an evil white man who means that I should die and that you should be blamed for it. He cares nothing for the lives he takes. He is merely interested in my mines, which will make him rich among white men.

"Listen to me, People of Guntali—if you will follow, I will lead you to this evil man. We will see that this man is brought to his death for the many murders he has committed."

The multitude gathered about him stood unmoving as he paused, their startled eyes turned toward their king. There was no bewilderment in Bwala's level gaze, but only the gray cloud of bitterness and disillusionment.

"Think you that we are fools, *Bwana*?" he said. "Think you that we would let ourselves be lured by lying words into a

trap, where your ghost-demon can slay us? No—I have my own plans. With the timely birth of the new moon after darkness comes, I shall give you unto our sacred ceremony.”

Then abruptly he turned and stalked away.

With his going, the people of Guntali no longer subjected the prisoner to indignities. Apparently a chosen victim for the Fire Ceremony was to be avoided, and they drifted away, leaving Kirk to lie in his helplessness beneath the baleful unwinking gaze of the crude-carved image of Nyua.

The heat of the sun was like a molten curtain of brilliance, shining down upon Marty Kirk. Yet the sun was no more incandescent than the rage that blazed in his soul.

Greed had plainly turned Joe Grimm from folly to madness—a complete viciousness that had brought about all this murderous business. And Kirk could visualize Grimm’s scheme to cause the Guntalis to rise up against the whites by slaying their hunters mysteriously—probably aided by a few of his unscrupulous mine workmen—with a silenced rifle. In the uprising, marked by the curse of Nyua—horror effects which Grimm had somehow learned to imitate—both Kirk and Jane would be killed.

The Governor-General would send soldiers, and the Guntalis would be driven out of Tembu-Loma. Grimm then could gain possession of the rich tin mine, secure with the Governor-General believing that the Kirks had died at the Guntalis’ hands.

Kirk strained his muscular power against the bonds that secured him, cursing that he should stumble upon Grimm’s perfidy too late. Grimm had Jane imprisoned somewhere, if he hadn’t already killed her. And Kirk himself would die horribly at the birth of the new moon that night.

He lay back helpless, panting, realizing the futility of struggle against the cords which restrained him.

It obviously was the end of the trail for him, and his rage burned even more hotly. Not that he was afraid to die. Rather, it sickened him that he was powerless to prevent Grimm from succeeding in his inhuman plans.

TORTURING hours ground slowly by, beneath the cruel blaze of the sun. They were hours made even more excruciating by Kirk’s terrible, helpless thinking. And after what seemed an eternity, the sun sank to the west and his tight, blood-shot eyes watched the creeping fingers of night lifting into the sky.

In that instant warriors paced into the circular compound, carrying a scaffolding of peeled poles and setting it up before the towering image of Nyua. Other warriors brought forth a great iron cauldron, raising it up to the top of the scaffolding and fastening it. From the manner with which the men handled the cauldron, Kirk guessed it was brimming with some kind of dangerous liquid.

“What is this device?” he asked.

The answering warrior’s laugh was a harsh grating sound. He said mockingly, “It is for your death at the birth of the moon. You will be suspended midway between the top and bottom of the scaffolding, and the potion will be poured over your body, burning the life out of you. The potion in this pot was brewed of the sap of the fire-bush. One drop of it is as deadly as an ember fanned to white heat.”

Kirk lay stiffly, staring. Perspiration wetted his face as he realized that the Ceremony of Fire was not merely the stake, but the gruesome death of having poured over him a devilish, searing escharotic which had been brewed to perhaps ten times the burning power of hydrochloric acid. Yet his gaze remained defiant as he stared at the black men.

“King Bwalla and all people of Guntali are fools,” he gritted. “You do not seem to realize that my death will bring hosts of white warriors from the Coast. Tembu-Loma will run red with the blood of the Guntali slain.”

“Let the white warriors come,” boasted the black. “Nyua will be abroad in the bush then, with fire and destruction. They will die before they even reach our *kraal*.”

Kirk snorted. “Nonsense. I see now that men stricken by that mystery fire that does not char the earth are not victims of your god, but of living Guntalis who strike down the victims and pour over them this potion you have here. You merely use

tricks to frighten enemies into believing Nyua stalks the bush. You are not magicians, but tricksters."

"You are wrong," the warrior replied. "The fire and destruction of Nyua are real. Our potion here is but an imitation of his holy works. Nothing is as powerful as Nyua." And he turned back to his companions, who were fastening up the raw-hide thongs that would hold Kirk helpless in the scaffolding.

"Loose the white man from his bonds and strip him of his garments," one of them said to him. "That is the law of the Ceremony of Fire."

"Wah," nodded the warrior. He roughly jerked Kirk to his feet. With a flip of his knife he slashed the tonga strips.

And in that split-second of freedom, Marty Kirk made his break. It was all nerve and no sense, the desperate move of a man goaded by the instinct for self-preservation.

HE crashed his head hard into the chin of the man beside him, bent down and went plunging through the group about him like a streaking fullback. And all the people in the village caught sight of his escape. A great roar rose up from them, and they surged at him from every side.

He kept on like a plunging bullet that nothing short of a spear or arrow might stop. In fact, he was expecting it, for such would be a more pleasant death than being seared alive.

But no spear was shafted at him. In a mad wave of hope, he realized that they wanted to keep him alive for this gruesome sacrifice—offering to their jungle god.

Only a miracle brought him safely to the jungle's edge, and he plunged into the dripping, frondiferous undergrowths of the bush with a dozen Guntalis at his heels. He ran wildly, changing directions, backtracking, never pausing a moment for breath in this desperate effort to escape from these black men.

The jungle seemed alive with Guntalis. Signal drums spoke to one another as the blacks searched on every side of him. He was drenched with sweat; his breathing was a harsh, painful panting. And while he fled this direction and that, he felt sure that all his efforts would come to nothing. Too great odds were against him to facilitate a complete escape.

Yet after the passage of two hours, when he paused in a fern-bed, his sodden clothing rent and tattered from the thorny growths of the forest, he realized that fate had played on his side. The sound of pursuit, the maddening thump of signal drums, were gone, and all he heard was the endless chorus of the jungle insects in the darkness. Somewhere off to his left, a lion roared its challenge as it stalked the bush for prey.

He ignored the danger of the prowling lion, for hope was reborn within him by this incredible escape from burning death. And he saw the one task before him. He had to get to Joe Grimm and force a confession of all his evil works out of him, and then march him as a prisoner back to the bungalow residence, where, by this time, the soldiers from the Coast must be waiting. The entire group could trek to the Guntali *kraal*, and peace and sanity could then be reestablished in Tembu-Loma.

The night was a pressing curtain of blackness. Yet the stars overhead were bright, glowing. Glancing at them through an opening he found in the treetops, he reckoned his direction. Tired and worn-out as he was, he set off toward the not-far-distant tin mine at a trot.

The jungle along this way was not as thickly grown and he was able to make good time. Lashed with anxiety over Jane's safety, plus a burning desire for vengeance against this man he had long trusted, he moved swiftly. In less than four hours, he was standing upon a rise that commanded a complete view of the shallow basin, where lay his tin mine.

The basin was a murky sea of darkness, with no light showing. Yet he knew the mine lay directly below him, with Grimm's cottage on the one side of it, and the settlement of N'glana workmen upon the other. At this late hour everyone likely would be asleep in their beds.

Carefully he worked his way down the slope, and soon he was standing before the darkened cottage where Grimm lived. For a full three minutes he stood rigid there, fists clenched. Then at last he walked forward in the direction of the cottage stoop, pausing there again to listen.

No sounds came through the screen door of the one-room cottage. Reaching out to the door, he noiselessly opened it and stepped inside. He listened for the noise of

breathing from the sleeping bunk, and hearing nothing he was caught with a sudden wave of apprehension. What if Grimm was not here, but was somewhere out in the jungle?

He remembered the electric lantern standing on the table in the center of the room, and he switched it on.

The bright light dazzled his eyes momentarily. But after he turned to the bunk, he halted in his tracks. He stared unbelievably, his theory of Grimm's guilt tumbling down on his head like a mocking house of cards.

Joe Grimm lay in the bunk—a burnt and horribly charred corpse!

VI

KIRK was too bewildered, too smitten to think rationally. Who could have done this? Who, after all, was the inhuman monster that killed and killed again so wantonly? Was it one of the other white prospectors, or . . .

"Come with me, *Bwana*, for I have something to show you," spoke a familiar voice from the doorway.

Kirk whirled and saw the black naked figure of Bori, the N'glana chief, standing there. Bori had a rifle gripped in his hands, and a bleak expression hardened his smooth black features.

"Bori!" Kirk gritted. "What are you doing here?"

"That will be explained later, *Bwana*. Come with me to the native workmen's settlement here and you will learn the truth."

Kirk stared at him a long moment. Things weren't right in his confused mind. Still, he had always trusted Bori. He walked to the door and silently followed the chief out into the dark night.

As they filed past the mine, he saw much activity in the N'glana settlement. A great fire had been kindled in the compound and natives moved to and fro. They seemed keyed up, excited.

And after he drew nearer the compound, Kirk saw something else. A white woman was standing beside the kindled fire. She was golden-haired, resolute, shapely. It was Jane, his wife—*alive!*

He ran to her, caught her in his arms and held her fast. The tight quiver in his throat dried up the rush of words that welled up within him.

Jane clung to him desperately. Her voice was strained and hopeless when she spoke. "Marty—oh, heavens, Marty—what is to become—of us?"

"Us?" He pushed her back to arms' length and looked deep into the terrible fear and horror he saw etched in her hollow eyes. "Nothing is going to happen to us now. The soldiers must have already reached Tembu-Loma, and with their help we'll—"

His voice choked off when the full intensity of her hopelessness penetrated him. He turned his eyes from her and saw the dozen N'glanas who stood in a circle about them. There was no friendship upon the faces of these black men. Their rifles were raised, the muzzles pointed squarely and threateningly at him.

He stood stiffly, unmoving. These were the jungle men whom he had educated into the knowledge of the white way of life. He saw now it had become a dangerous knowledge—knowledge that they had learned to use to their own brutal purpose. Instead of being devoted to him as he had long believed, they were devoted only to themselves.

"What insanity is this?" he cried at Chief Bori. "I have always believed you my devoted companion, and now I find you are turned into a treacherous beast."

"Is it treachery for us to want our own homeland back again?" Bori asked evenly. "Are we beasts because we mean to drive the cursed Guntalis to their destruction?"

"This inhuman work will merely bring your *own* destruction," retorted Kirk. "You cannot commit murder after murder and go unpunished."

Chief Bori laughed flatly. With a brazen gesture, he brought out the silencer he had stolen from Kirk's store-house and attached it to his rifle's muzzle.

HE looked steadily into the white man's face.

"No one will brand us as murderers," Bori jeered. "*Bwana* Grimm showed us the way to bring this all about."

"So he was in this with you, after all!"

"In a way that is so," explained Bori. "Ever since you made him manager of this mine, he chided his N'glana workmen for believing that the Guntalis used a risen corpse to destroy our power. They asked him to prove it otherwise. He took up the

MURDER

**A killer's
footsteps
slithering
softly in
the gloom,
moonlight
glinting on
a weapon
—then the
merciless
stroke of
murder!**



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By SAMUEL MICHAEL FULLER

TWO COMPLETE DETECTIVE BOOKS

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challenge and made friends of various Guntalis so that he could visit their village and slyly wrest from them some of their secrets.

"He learned that the stench of the swamp is caused by *wassa* grass falling into the water, giving off vile odors when it rotted—and that the Guntalis produce the stench wherever they choose by carrying sealed pots of the rotting grass in swamp water, opening and closing the cover of the pot as they will. He learned that our village guards were first struck down unconscious, then burned to death by pouring a potion made of the boiled sap of the fire-brush over them—a trick not only to inspire fear in us, but to give them a chance to steal into our sleeping *kraal* to poison our cooking pots.

"I was filled with rage when this news was brought to me," continued Bori. "It made me vow to destroy the Guntalis for using this vile trickery against us."

"And you stole that silencer to murder innocent Guntali hunters, so that Bwala and his people would be inflamed against all white men," growled Kirk. "You knew Bwala, in vengeance, would throw the Nyua curse upon us. And by imitating his tricks, killing whites, you would make the Governor-General absolutely believe the Guntalis were the guilty ones, and he would drive them out of the bush with the power of his soldiers."

"That is true," nodded Bori. "Most of us have been anxious to regain the rule of Tembu-Loma—all except your houseboys, Lakeeto and his man-child Gawai, and Gawai's six young companions, who were steadfast to your white ways. We did not tell them our plans, choosing them rather as people to die."

"But if Grimm knew how these Guntali tricks were done, why did he not tell me so when you began your tricks?" Kirk asked.

"Because he was a greedy man," was the reply. "He happened to overhear some of his workmen discussing our plans, and he came to me, saying that if I allowed him to get possession of your mine, he would not reveal our intentions to you. I promised. And he was the one who suggested my men steal your wife, telling us that surely you would go out to rescue her from the Guntalis."

"Sure," sneered Kirk. "Because I'd take you along and you could heighten the Guntalis' guilt by Nyua horror tricks, and you could desert me so the Guntalis could capture and murder me. He told you my charred body in the Guntali *kraal* would be absolute proof. Right?"

Bori nodded. "And when we left you and started for this mine settlement, we overtook Lakeeto and killed him."

"Just as you murdered Grimm with the burning potion when you reached here, so that no living person would know you N'glanas are murderers and betrayers of my trust. Let me say to you, Bori, you will not succeed in your evil work. The white soldiers—"

"The soldiers themselves will prove our innocence," scoffed the chief. "White men know that only Guntalis are able to burn victims without scorching the earth. After we return soon to your settlement, the houseboys' charred bodies will be proof of a Guntali uprising. The finding of other charred bodies on the trail—including yours and that of your wife—the soldiers will be enraged. They will destroy the Guntalis, and Tembu-Loma will become ours again."

HE TURNED and spoke to two of his men beside him. He said, "Go now and bring out the urns of fire liquid we have brewed. We must get all things done quickly."

"We have long been your friends, Bori," Jane entreated the chief as the men paced away on their errand. "Is it just that you kill us in such an inhuman way?"

Bori gazed at her unfeelingly. "Are your lives more important than the honor of the N'glana nation?"

"*They are more important than your cheap little ambitions, Bori!*" yelled Kirk, and with a sweep of his hand that caught the chief by surprise, he ripped the rifle from Bori's grasp. As he fired from a hip position, the silenced muzzle made a whooshing sound as he shot Bori squarely in the head. Then he swung the gun at the horde of remaining N'glanas.

The shocked, stunned blacks fell back before the fury of his noiseless fire. But it was only momentary. Their rifles came up, and Kirk knew that he and Jane were to be slaughtered by a fusillade from which there was no escape.

Yet not one shot was fired, for, as if by an incredible miracle, the firelighted compound suddenly became alive with streaking arrows. N'glanas fell one upon another as feathered shafts skewered their black bodies. Those who survived strove to fight back against this menace from the jungle grove that partially circled the settlement. But they could not shoot against an enemy they could not see. Nor could they protect themselves in the open, fire-bright compound.

Jane clung terrified to Kirk as the compound turned into a welter of bodies—a place made more terrible by the frenzied cries of the N'glanas who sought to flee from a doom from which there was no escape. And where every man had fallen, a large company of Guntali warriors—their war-bows still in their grasp—emerged from the jungle grove.

King Bwala was among them. He came up abjectly before Kirk, bowing his head to him in shame.

"I am a pig in thy sight, *Bwana*," he said. "If it were not for the hand of Nyua that gave you the chance to escape my *kraal*, I would have sacrificed the body of a friend to the Ceremony of Fire."

"You atoned for all that by saving me from the hands of these mad N'glanas," Kirk responded.

"Rage brought me here—not a desire to aid you," Bwala said. "After you escaped and the men returned to our *kraal*,

I reasoned that you would set out here to gain the aid of *Bwana Grimm*. I led my men here, and we arrived as Bori and you came into this firelighted compound. We were about to overwhelm you when Bori spoke and revealed his evil work. And the soundless, flaming spear you snatched from his hand proved that the deaths of my hunters was caused by Bori—not by a white-man demon. So I signaled my men to slay all but these and thy golden-haired wife."

He touched Kirk in the Guntali gesture of reverence.

"I have learned the one great truth, *Bwana*, that you are still our brother and that white man works are good. Your enemies henceforth will be our enemies, and Tembu-Loma will prosper in peace. I swear it by the name of holy Nyua."

"It will be so," solemnly nodded Kirk.

Thus it was, when dawn began streaking the eastern sky, that Kirk and Jane trekked their solitary way through the jungle fastness toward the main trail that would lead them back to their settlement and home. Though the horror and bitterness of their experiences still clung to them, they both were conscious of a feeling of contentment.

The greed and petty ambitions of ruthless men had won them the complete friendship of the Guntalis. It gave promise of a lasting peace in Tembu-Loma and the ultimate conquest of its virgin wilderness.

They had never asked for more than that.



BLACK MAHOGANY

By DON CUSHMAN

A fortune in black wood—for any man with skin tough enough to shed barbed arrows whose stomach could hold poisoned drinks without shriveling; whose heart was cold enough to resist treacherous Seeva, the dancing girl. A treasure in black mahogany—for Armless O'Neil—if he could live long enough to take it.

SIESTA TIME, and Coquilhatville bleached in the equatorial sun. Nothing moved along its rammed-earth streets. Even the chickens, scrawny African birds of which Coquilhatville must have owned a hundred thousand, had ceased their interminable scratching to crouch with bills wide in every patch of shade. It was the time of day when things stood still, life suspended—when even the officials of the Colonial Administration stopped cursing the bureaucrats of Leopoldville and slept in long reed chairs.

The sound of a riverboat whistle, vibrating flatly over the fly drone of the afternoon, at first produced no quiver of life. Finally, the insect-proof door of l'Hôtel Cambyse swung open, and a man appeared.

He was white, or perhaps "Caucasian" would be the word for him, as the tropic suns of three continents had long since turned his skin the hue of a bronze Buddah. He was under average in height, more than average in breadth, and from the left sleeve of his wrinkled linen jacket protruded a steel hook which flashed in the sun as he walked along.

As nearly anyone from Cairo to the Cape could tell you, this picturesquely ugly man was Armless O'Neil.

Armless O'Neil sighted the steamboat, its size distorted by the heat waves which rebounded from the Congo, and judged his speed so their arrival at the dock exactly coincided.

The boat cut her paddle, swung in a gentle arc against the current, and shivered to rest against the fermenting timbers. A Senegalese tied her fast, and the plank banged ashore. O'Neil impatiently scanned the passengers.

Fifteen alighted—two Belgian clerks

home from a celebration in Leopoldville, or the more voluptuous dives of Brazzaville across The Pool, a woman missionary whose skin was just recovering from the peeling stage, and twelve assorted natives.

O'Neil cursed. Due to the proximity of the woman missionary he confined his profanity strictly to German, Egyptian and Congolese. When the woman looked at him with a little surprise he tipped his sun helmet and said:

"Excuse me."

"Yes?" She evidently thought he had a question, so he asked:

"Madame, was there a young man named Tommy Huston aboard?"

"I'm not certain. What did he . . ."

"He's a dissolute, ne'er-do-well fiddle player who hit Cairo with a Yankee dance band seven years ago and never got home. He's a braggart and a liar, and he has delusions of being the Don Juan of Dakar and all points east."

"No!" she answered a trifle huffily. "I'm certain there's no such person aboard."

O'Neil cursed in choice Spanish and started back up the street. Instead of going to the hotel, he turned and followed a board sidewalk which led, by a series of apparently purposeless curves, to a much-added-to structure with a red sheet-metal roof. The sign over the door of this place had long since been corroded a grayish blank by the tropics' inevitable fungus, but the stale wine odor which emanated was sufficient to indicate its character.

He passed through a screened veranda to the interior which was long, and dim, and cluttered with tables. Two persons were in sight—an insignificant little Englishman who sat disconsolately at a



There was a mighty, vibrating roar, and the roadbed rocked beneath them.

side table, and a native who slept on the floor. A breeze from some remote recess of the building felt actually cool, so O'Neil took a place in the breath of it, and waited. When no one appeared, he beat on the table with his hook arm.

"Cognac!" he shouted.

The proprietor, a tall Moroccan, sat up in his hammock behind the bar and took note of the one-man uproar.

Said O'Neil, "Feisal, you dog of a believer, how does an Irish Catholic get himself service in this heathen sump-hole?"

"FEISAL," whose name was actually Mohammed Kadir, approached softly on tennis shoes and bowed with the Moslem salute.

"Master! Your thirst must be the thirst of ten thousand martyrs that you knock chips from my costly tables during the hour of rest."

"To hell with you," said O'Neil. "And to hell with your tables, too. Bring me cognac. *French* cognac—and ice."

"Ice! Behold, he asks for ice! These six days we have had not a fragment, and now they say it must be twelve days more until that unblest camshaft of your infidel freezing machine has its bearings brazed in Leopoldville—"

"I'll settle for cognac and a bottle of water."

Mohammed bowed, backing toward the bar.

"And make sure it's French. Get it, *French!*"

When the cognac came it was cheap Spanish. O'Neil tasted it, and spat.

"This is no cognac!"

"Behold the label, it says—"

O'Neil threatened with his hook. "Call this cognac, this kerosene—"

"Ten thousand prayers, Master. I am your slave, but . . ." Mohammed spread his hands helplessly. "What with the new administrator, the duties, the taxes. It used to be one complained of malaria and ants. Now it is taxes, malaria and ants. May a curse rest on that dog of an administrator through the ninety and nine cities of hell for bringing on us this plague of taxes."

O'Neil poured himself a drink and was contemplating it when he noticed the little

Englishman approaching from his side table.

"Excuse me," the Englishman said apologetically, "but I happened to overhear your conversation with the proprietor, and it just so happens that I have a bottle of good whisky." He opened an alligator-skin valise and drew out a tall bottle. "I don't drink strong liquor myself, but I do carry some for medicine."

"Bushmill's!" gasped O'Neil. "Sit down, Mr.—"

"Wentworth. Elwood Wentworth."

"O'Neil."

They shook hands.

"Believe me, Mr. Wentworth, you should never prefer water to whisky here in the tropics. Without whisky the whites would never hold out through the next rainy season."

"You've been here a long time?"

"Too damned long!"

"Then you're perhaps familiar with the concessions."

"A few."

"Now, mahogany—"

"Never knew a man who made a paper franc in it."

"Oh dear!" said Mr. Wentworth.

"Say, you haven't been sucked in on a mahogany deal!"

"It isn't quite that . . ."

O'Neil disposed of one glass of Bushmill's and poured another. "Mr. Wentworth, just settle back and tell me all about it."

Mr. Wentworth breathed deeply after the manner of a careful man beginning a lengthy story.

"It all started when Uncle Geoffrey came to visit me at my flat in Chatham. Chatham is near London. Quiet, you understand, but just the place for a rest. I'm not married you know, never having—"

"Sure," said O'Neil.

"Uncle Geoffrey said it would be an ideal place for him to get over some tropical fever that he called the 'the blackwater.' Not that I minded at all, you understand. It was rather nice having someone around when I got through at the office, even though he did borrow money from me."

"Sure," O'Neil encouraged him, pouring Bushmill's.

"Finally, though, he got to borrowing

quite a bit, and what was worse, he spent it all on liquor. And—well, to be frank, Mr. O'Neil, Uncle Geoffrey took to seeing things."

"Snakes?"

"Yes, and worse. Oh, I'll tell you we had some interesting times, especially when Uncle Geoffrey saw the crocodiles."

"I can imagine."

"I hate to say it, but it was almost a mercy when he passed away. . . . But before he did, he gave me something."

"A deed to the concession?"

"Well, a sixty per cent share, which was all of Bondele that he owned. But there was something else."

MR. WENTWORTH opened his valise again, this time pulling out a little wooden box. Ingeniously fitted together and hinged without a screw or peg, it was obviously the product of African craftsmen. Its surface had been smoothed down by ese leaves, and rubbed with goats' wool until it had an oily luster of great beauty. One of the most striking features of the box, however, was its color. Although its peculiar, interlocking fiddle-back grain stamped it as African mahogany, it was darker than most ebony. O'Neil lifted the cover and glanced inside. It contained a dried bat's wing.

"Gri-gri?" he asked.

"Yes. It was his charm against the 'devil of disease,' as he called it." Mr. Wentworth was a trifle breathless. "Did you notice the drill hole? That's where a wood dealer in London tested to see if the color was solid throughout. He said that natural mahogany of that color is worth a—"

"Mr. Wentworth! If you could lumber any amount of heartwood of this quality, you'd be rich. Now, this cedrelas—that's what it is, of course, no true mahogany grows in Africa—this cedrelas naturally runs from red to orange, but give it a soaking in dilute sulphuric acid, dry it, give it a shot of copperas and ammonia. Result?—wood black like this box."

"Then you don't think any wood like this grows on the concession?"

"Not a sliver!"

"Oh my!" said Mr. Wentworth, almost in tears.

"The best thing you could do is go home."

"But I do so hate to leave without even going out to visit Bondele!"

"Hoven't you even been out to the concession?"

"I started. I hired four natives to paddle me there in a dugout canoe, and—" Mr. Wentworth leaned across the table, "When we were only a few miles beyond Chapleauville, somebody shot a poisoned arrow at me!"

O'Neil cleared his throat. "Mr. Wentworth. You haven't been taking atabrine to ward off the fever, have you?"

Mr. Wentworth started to answer, but instead he dug once again into the contents of the alligator-skin valise. With a triumphant movement he unrolled a strip of wrapping paper and allowed an arrow to fall to the table. It was the regular native article, about eighteen inches long, tipped with a triangular trade barb, the forward portion of the shaft smeared with a black, viscous substance resembling coffee extract.

O'Neil sniffed the black stuff. "What then?"

"Well, naturally, I turned back. When I reached Chapleauville I hired some natives to deliver a message to Uncle Geoffrey's partner telling him I was there, and that I wanted him to send his launch. Three weeks I waited without receiving an answer, so I came back here." He tapped the table impressively. "Now, the question is, why didn't he send for me?"

"Drunk," yawned O'Neil. "Or dead. You'd be surprised what little trouble it is to die in Africa."

"Well, the old partner is dead. Mr. Ladue. He sold out to Mr. Martinez."

"Pablo Martinez, the Portugese?"

"Yes."

"Go home to Chatham. Go by the next boat. I wouldn't have Martinez for a partner if you gave me all the gold in Jo-han."

"Oh dear!" said Mr. Wentworth.

In the midst of the little man's despair, the insect-proof door squeaked open and slapped shut. A tall young man strode across the room.

"O'Neil!"

"Tommy!" cried O'Neil, forgetting the quandary of Mr. Wentworth. "I was down to meet the boat, but there were you?"

"Sorry," grinned Tommy, "but my siesta

wasn't quite complete when we docked."

When the greetings were over, O'Neil became stern.

"What's this about you making that Cape Town jail?"

Tommy dismissed the Cape Town jail with a snap of his fingers and sniffed the Bushmill's. "A-a-h!"

O'Neil shouted, "Feisal! — another glass!" Then: "We have this fine liquor through the courtesy of Mr. Wentworth. Tommy Huston, meet Mr. Wentworth."

"Mr. Wentworth, I'm glad to meet you!" exclaimed Tommy as though meeting Mr. Wentworth had been his lifelong ambition.

"Now, what was it about that Cape Town jail?" asked O'Neil.

"Oh, that! You see, I started back to the States just like I promised when you staked me, but I ran into a Dutchman by the name of Van Ruh, and he had an idea. We start a mining concern, sneak into Namaqualand, and wait for the government to run us out. Then we carry it to the courts. Publicity, see? If the stockholders in the diamond monopoly ever found out about the tons of stones lying around in Namaqualand, boom! to hell goes the stock. Result—the monopoly doesn't want the publicity so they buy us off."

"Legal blackmail!" moaned O'Neil. "Well, what went wrong?"

"That damned Van Ruh turned yellow and skipped, leaving me in that jail." Wishing to change the subject, Tommy examined the little box. "What's this?"

O'Neil told him.

"Mahogany?" gasped Tommy. "Black? Cripes, Mr. Wentworth, do you know what this stuff is worth?"

"Mr. O'Neil has just convinced me it's not worth much of anything."

Sternly, "O'Neil, you have the gall to describe me as a blackmailer while all the time you're drinking this good man's liquor and trying to talk him out of his mahogany!"

"Tommy, listen! You take this cedrelas, dry it, soak it in sulphuric acid, dry it again, give it a shot of copperas and ammonia. It turns black. Simple."

"Simple! It's idiotic. Sulphuric acid and copperas!" Tommy poured another drink. "Mr. Wentworth, you're a fortunate man I happened in just when I did. Not

that O'Neil's a crook—he's just plain dumb. Never sees business possibilities in things. Now tell me where this black wood came from."

Mr. Wentworth told. When he had finished Tommy nodded:

"Sure! They shoot poisoned arrows at you. Why, Mr. Wentworth? I'll tell you why! This Martinez fellow has probably murdered Ladue, and now he's trying to drive you away so he can hog the black mahogany all for himself."

O'Neil said, "Tommy, you're not doing the little guy any favor when you talk that way. A stray arrow, a wood process job, mix it up with two shots of liquor and bingo!—you're the mahogany king of the Belgian Congo."

II

TOMMY'S eyes chanced to rove to the scars which O'Neil's hook had carved in the table top. The table was mahogany, and where the fresh wood was exposed it was almost as dark as the wood of the box.

"Where'd this mahogany come from?" he asked Mohammed.

"Perhaps from above Chapleauville. Beyond that I cannot say."

Tommy whacked the table. "Above Chapleauville! That's where the concession is located, and that settles it!"

Mr. Wentworth spent the next minutes doing some thinking. At last he spoke:

"I'm a trifle helpless, all by myself. My experience, you see. Now, if I had some partners. Experienced ones—"

"Mr. Wentworth, you're not asking us to go in on the deal?"

"Well, if you didn't mind. I'd gladly relinquish half my interest, that is, for a small consideration. . . ."

"Sold!" said Tommy. "How much do you want?"

"Well, I already have better than a hundred pounds in the venture. Including what I lent to Uncle Geoffrey it would be close to two hundred. But I'll part with half my sixty per cent for, say—do you think one-hundred twenty-five pounds would be exorbitant?"

Tommy waved a careless hand. "A hundred and twenty-five she is. Just put it in writing."

Mr. Wentworth put it in writing. Tommy held out his palm to O'Neil.

"Would you mind lending me my half till a later date?"

"To hell with you," said O'Neil.

"O'Neil, doesn't friendship mean anything to you?"

"Sure. But not a hundred and twenty-five pounds sterling. Listen, Tommy, you fiddle-playing fat-head, you've put me over the riffles for the last time. Oh, I have the dough all right. I've got four thousand francs right here in my moneybag, but it's not going to be used to pay off Uncle Geoffrey's whisky debts. I'm using it to get out of this stinking country. I'm going to take it back to good old Chicago and open me a billiard parlor."

"A poolroom?" asked Tommy as though nauseated.

"A poolroom."

Tommy said, "Go home, Mr. Wentworth. To hell with you and your million-dollar mahogany. It wouldn't pay out. Labor's too high. Ten cents a day. Besides, O'Neil gets itchy between the shoulderblades when he thinks of poisoned arrows. And he doesn't want to tangle with Marinez, either. No, he'd rather be snug and safe in Chi playing Kelly-pool."

O'Neil cursed and banged down a fistful of Belgian treasury notes. "I'll pay ninety pounds and not a damned cent more."

"Of course, if that's all it's worth. . . ."

"It's a hell of a lot more than it's worth!" shouted O'Neil. . . .

At one time the Department of Colonies poured many millions of francs into development of the Ncimbo River country. It built docks, and lorry roads, and even a hundred and fifty kilometers of narrow-gauge railroad lines, hoping thus to encourage the production of rubber, palm nuts and mahogany. But that had been fifteen or twenty years before, and when Armless O'Neil, Tommy Huston and Mr. Wentworth rode up the Ncimbo in a dug-out canoe, little evidence of the Colonial Department's enterprise remained.

Now and then they would pass a fragment of dock jutting into the sluggish current, or a metal-roofed shed making its last stand against rust, fungus and termites. And then the jungle would close

in, its great trees arching beneath their weight of parasitic vines, and the royal expenditure would seem puny indeed.

The town of Chapleauville, nearest trading post to the Bondele concession, also seemed to be losing in its struggle against the jungle. Once a week, they were told, the town was enlivened by the departure of the tea-kettle locomotive which made a fifty-kilometer run along the weavy road-bed of a narrow-gauge to conform with colonial regulation, but this did not take place during the day they spent there.

Above Chapleauville, Mr. Wentworth became extremely jumpy. A dozen times he sat straight with apprehension and said:

"Gentlemen, it was in a place just like this! I was sitting, just like I am right now, when suddenly there was a flash!—and the next instant that poisoned arrow was quivering in the side of the canoe."

And each time he said this, O'Neil would look so magnificently bored that Mr. Wentworth almost hoped somebody would shoot a poisoned arrow, and that that arrow would come very, very close to O'Neil. However, nothing of the sort happened, and early the next morning they arrived at Bondele.

DURING the boom days of mahogany, Bondele had been prosperous. Its resident manager lived regally in a large plantation house with three wives of the Ngelewa tribe, while three hundred black men labored in mill and cutting grounds. But now the shrubbery of the jungle grew rank in the roadway which led from the crumbling dock to the plantation buildings, and herds of elephants had trampled fences and garden plots.

O'Neil spent half an hour poking through buildings, examining the old squaring mill, the coils of wire rope now mostly brittle with rust, the little locomotive which sat on a spur of the Chapleauville line, and the Caterpillar which, praise Allah, had been covered with an oiled tarp.

"Hello there!" O'Neil shouted over and over, trying to raise the caretaker, if one existed. His only answer came from a black Ngila monkey which scolded him from the balcony of the plantation house.

Mr. Wentworth was at his wits end to explain the abandonment. "Mr. Marinez

must be here some place. He wouldn't just pick up and go after buying Mr. Ladue's interest."

"Why not? I slapped ninety pounds into this rust heap, and I'd like to pick up and go."

Tommy said, "Can't you see you're hurting Mr. Wentworth's feelings?"

"To hell with Mr. Wentworth's feelings, and to hell with you, too."

While they were speaking, seven men came in sight where the railroad spur entered the jungle. They advanced single file between the rails, the sunlight flashing from the metal of the guns they carried, and from the tips of cartridges in the belts which were slung across their naked shoulders.

The man in the lead was a gigantic Senegalese with a heavy boned face, and eyes dull and savage as a great ape's. Unlike the others, he did not wear the common, native hodge-podge of clothing. This fellow wore a sun helmet, a linen shirt without buttons, linen trousers, and a pair of sandals that might have walked out of the Old Testament.

O'Neil greeted him in Senegalese, but he did not choose to answer. All he did was move his high-powered rifle around to the crook of his arm and keep advancing. He stopped at a distance of a dozen paces with his men ranged on either side.

"What you doin' on thees groun'?" he asked in an accent both African and French.

"We own it," answered O'Neil serenely.

"Señor Marinez, he's own thees."

"All right, take us to Señor Marinez."

"Me, *Motala* take you?"

"Yes, you splay-footed son of a jack-ass!" screamed O'Neil.

Making a ceremony of the movement, Motala released the safety of the rifle.

"Perhaps you theenk Señor Marinez does not want I should shoot men who come snooping on his concession?" He drew a bead on O'Neil's temple, and then, a little reluctantly, he lowered the rifle. "Nex' time I will fire. It is my word, and Motala keep his word." He smiled, not pleasantly, showing his strong teeth. Like all natives, he gloried in having big talk against a Caucasian. He whacked the stock of the rifle contemptuously, "Not that I need thees rifle. Not

me, who was champion wrestler of all Senegal!" He was bragging and rolling his muscles for the benefit of the natives who made up his little army.

O'Neil spat. "Call *that* muscle? Come here, oh infidel pig, and lay your woman's hand on an arm that could twist off your neck like a cockerel's."

Motala came forward, but only a step or two. He stood looking at the sleeve of O'Neil's shirt with the muscle flexing beneath it. Suddenly Tommy's laugh broke the tight-drawn silence:

"Behold the coward, O mighty O'Neil! He dares not feel your muscle, knowing he will be proved a weakling."

MOTALA had no other course, so he swaggered forward and reached for O'Neil's bicep, but when he came within range O'Neil's hook arm traveled in a short arc connecting with Motala's fingers where they bent around the gun.

Motala let the rifle fall and staggered backward, sucking his carved fingers. Then, with a bellow of rage, he charged.

Now, when Motala charged, it was inevitable that his opponent retreated. It had always been thus, and he came to expect it. But O'Neil was not the retreating kind. On the contrary, he advanced a step. This apparently insane action threw Motala off balance. It took him a moment to set himself for the mighty blow he had intended. He let it go, but O'Neil was inside.

Motala was a set-up for an uppercut, but O'Neil didn't throw it. Instead, his hook arm found the opening at the front of Motala's linen trousers. There was a whirl of buttons, and the trousers fluttered around his feet.

Motala tried for one of his wrestler's holds, but O'Neil was out and away.

"Thrice son of a goat, thy pants are drooping!"

Motala's pants tangled and he sprawled across the termite-eaten railroad ties. O'Neil tromped on his fingers. Motala kicked his way out of the trousers, but by that time O'Neil had him covered with the rifle.

Awed by the manner in which O'Neil had handled their leader, the natives fled and no shouting from Motala could stop them. "Now take us to this Marinez!"

commanded O'Neil, moving rifle slightly.

Motala looked down the barrel and caused no further trouble.

"CULO," Marinez's plantation house, was about five kilometers distant. It was a large place, white painted, with a double veranda around all four sides. At the far edge of the clearing were forty or fifty thatch and mud huts, and down by the dock were three metal-covered warehouses in excellent repair. A path of white-washed cobbles led through the well-trimmed garden to the house.

It was siesta time, and nobody was around. In the shade of the veranda the Senegalese stopped and the prodding of the rifle would make him go no further.

"Señor Marinez will see no one during the hour of siesta."

"Marinez!" bellowed O'Neil. "Marinez, come out here!"

There was movement in the deep shade of the interior, the sound of footsteps on a matted floor, and a hook-nosed man of indeterminate Near-East blood came out to look at O'Neil and his companions with black, suspicious eyes.

"Shemeshal—these men—" Motala started, but the hook-nosed man quieted him with an impatient gesture. He turned to O'Neil and said:

"You are welcome to the house of Marinez." The greeting disposed of, he spoke sharply in Senegalese, "Motala, why in the name of the Prophet do you bring



O'Neil came down on the Senegalese with the hook.

these men here at this hour? And what is that hook-armed one doing with the rifle I purchased you at the cost of twelve hundred francs?"

When Motala hesitated, O'Neil answered, "Your man got a little careless with it so I took it away from him, and he brought us here because I kept its muzzle in his back. Now call Marinez."

"You must wait!" said the man called "Shemeshal," switching once again to English. "This is siesta time, and—"

"Marinez, damn you, come here!" belated O'Neil, hammering at the door casing with his hook arm.

Shemeshal lifted his shoulders in an Arabian shrug, which is perhaps the highest shrug on earth. Motala started to withdraw.

"Your gun!" called O'Neil, tossing the rifle.

Motala caught it, and stood there, looking at O'Neil with his hate-filled, unintelligent eyes. "We will meet again, hook arm, and when—"

"Go!" cried Shemeshal.

O'Neil kept hammering, "Marinez! Marinez!"

In half a minute or so Marinez came around the veranda, walking in the rolling manner which is so common with big men in the tropics. He was not bad looking, perhaps when young he had been handsome. His mustache was carefully trimmed, his hair clipped close to remove all traces of gray. His skin was oily, extremely brown, and spotted a little from the prevalent tropic liver complaint.

"Who raises the dead by calling my name?" he asked. Then, seeing O'Neil, "You! I remember you, and your hook arm. Wait, do not tell me! Marinez, he's never forget a name nor a face. It was on the steamboat *Dobondau*. We play cards. Armless O'Neil—the same?"

"The same," grinned O'Neil, and they shook hands. He introduced the others, and Marinez made them welcome.

"You perhaps came over from Uganda?" he asked hopefully.

"No."

He expelled his breath in a manner which could have indicated disappointment. "But forgive! It is the host's duty to pour brandy, not make the question, no?"

From the upper veranda they had a

good view of the plantation. There was another clearing with more huts, several acres of cassava patch, and older fields now grown up to ochilla weed. Across the river on rising ground was an area of small parks where, at one time or other, rubber trees had been planted in rows.

The veranda, and the portion of the interior which could be seen, was excellently furnished after the ornate East.

"Nice place," remarked O'Neil.

Marinez nodded acknowledgment, and poured brandy and soda. "What was it about Motala?" he asked. "Did I not hear you had some trouble with that dull-witted Senegalese?"

"He tried to run us off our concession."

"Your concession?"

"Bondele. We're the new owners. Your partners, I should say."

MR. WENTWORTH spoke up, "Surely you received the messages I sent!"

"Please! I know of no message. No partner, except Geoffrey Clifton—"

"He was my uncle. When he died he willed me this interest, and I sold half of it to these gentlemen."

"Dead! Alas, what is it you English say?—'here yesterday, gone tomorrow. Gentleman, may I propose a toast—"

O'Neil lifted his glass, "Here's to Uncle Geoffrey and his crocodiles!"

"Ho! I do not get it, but it is good, yes?" Marinez drank. "So, what do you plan at Bondele?"

"To cut mahogany."

"Mahogany! Ah, *señors*, there was once, perhaps, money in mahogany, but the day she is gone. You perhaps come with capital. So you spend it, and then you look for more. Believe me, the jungles of the Ncimbo drink money like the sands of Sahara drink a man's blood."

"You seem to be doing all right," smiled O'Neil.

"Yes. But not in mahogany. With me it is the palm nut and copal. You have read the miracles performed by the American soap manufacturers with the palm nut? The secret of Cleopatra's perpetual beauty. Imagine—and from our poor palm nuts which the native used to spit away."

After another drink, Marinez yawned.

"Even good brandy and better company

cannot deny me my rest. If it please you there are hammocks on the south-east veranda. Or if you prefer, liquor in the cellar."

III

O'NEIL slept for an hour, and arose in the druglike heat of afternoon to wander around the plantation buildings. Although several months had passed since high water—the only time when steamboats could navigate this far up the silt-filled Ncimbo—there were only a couple tons of palm nuts strewn across one of the storehouse floors, and in a corner of another a few sacks of "jackass" copal. Any trader with a ten-thousand-franc stock of trade goods would have accumulated a dozen times the value in a season.

"Last steamboat take away much palm nuts, copal?" O'Neil asked a native whom he roused.

"Take little, bring much."

"Much what?"

"What the Master use—brandy, tin-can food, big chair. Maybe nex' time steamboat bring ice machine. So I hear. What for is ice machine?"

O'Neil tried to explain, "Ice. Hard water, see? Cold. Put in whisky to give bellyache."

"*Ai-ai-ai!*" cried the native, thinking of the folly of the white man who brought in a machine to make the bellyache.

O'Neil went back to the house where he found that Tommy had awakened and had tracked down Marinez's supply of liquor.

"It doesn't add up," O'Neil said, pouring a drink for himself. "Now look at this liquor—French, twenty years old. Worth a hundred francs a liter. I'll tell you, Tommy, Marinez is in the deep dollars."

"Sure. Palm nuts. The secret of Cleopatra, remember?"

"Secret of Cleopatra be damned. He hasn't three tons of nuts on the place. Last year he shipped next to nothing. Yet, here he is pouring hundred-franc brandy. And do you know what he's bringing in?—an ice machine!"

Tommy was thoughtful. "You don't suppose he has his hooks into the black mahogany? He could be shipping it from

some place else. Making plenty, too."

"It makes a man wonder," admitted O'Neil. . . .

Like many Portuguese, Marinez entertained in the grand manner. After the cool of night had settled, supper was served beneath hanging lamps in a screened patio at the center of the building. Food included roasted kid, heaps of curried rice, a native salad of plantain, banana and boiled cassava drenched with palm-nut oil, there was dessert of canned peaches—and above all, liquor, liquor, and more liquor.

Besides host and guests, Shemeshal was there, silent, falcon-eyed. He ate little, drank little and spoke little—but he listened a great deal.

After dinner Marinez leaned back in his chair and asked, "What is your plan at Bondele?"

"Like I said, we plan to cut mahogany," answered O'Neil.

"Friends. For two reasons you can make no money: First the market she is very bad. Second, only once a year can the boat haul your wood away."

"We'll raft it down."

"Not on the Ncimbo. It is too slow. Sometimes, the native say, the Ncimbo she flow backward. No, *senhors*, the mahogany is no good."

"Then why did you buy Ladue's interest in Bondele?"

"Because he was my friend, and he need the money."

"I heard he needed money. Ladue had a hard time keeping in liquor."

Marinez smiled to indicate he got the direction of O'Neil's remark. It had been told from Coquilhatville to Nifowa how Marinez had kept Ladue drunk. He elevated his feet, lighted an Habana cigar, and looked at the stars enlarged by the veil of mosquito netting as by a mist.

"You know how it is with the white man in our tropics, *senhor*. He comes with great hopes to the new country. He sees its fertility, the luxuriance like the garden where Eve went naked, no?" Marinez wafted a kiss from the tips of his thick fingers at the thought of Eve going naked. "Then, after one, maybe three years, what? The mosquito has laid the drug in his blood. He takes quinine until his teeth loosen and he hears bells in his ears, or else he takes atabrine which softens

the brain. It is hot. He sweats, but what of that? Still the heat. He sleeps and grows bored. The days are long. One cannot sietesta forever, no? So he drinks. At first half a bottle a day. Then a bottle, two bottles. Time goes on, and he dies. He is buried. In six months, a year, the damp-rot has done its work and even his bones they are gone. Then what is left? Only a heap of old whiskey bottles to show that a white man has come that way. Thus the jungle, *senhors*."

Marinez went on, "You are not rich, no? Yes, it is as I guessed. But you are my friends. I do not wish you should lose."

"What are you getting at?" asked O'Neil.

"It is that I will make the princely offer for Bondele."

"How much?"

"Say—one hundred thousand francs."

"Translate that into dollars and you have three thousand. No."

Marinez smiled recklessly, "Generosity and strong drink has made of me the fool. Two hundred thousand francs!"

"No."

"Ah, you are saving me the money. Come, drink, *senhor*! The bottom is the most beautiful part of the glass, is it not so?"

THE drinks Marinez poured had been very large, and now they became larger. After a couple more he clapped his hands for the servant and gave him a command in a low voice. Soon three natives entered, two carrying tom-toms and the third a balafron. It took the balafron player a while to set up, and as he worked Shemeshal became tense, staring at the beaded hangings of a doorway with cobra-like intensity.

The "music" started with the tom-toms being beaten in a peculiar rocking rhythm. After a while the balafron came in, but with different time than the tom-toms. This, combined with its minor melody, giving to the whole a weird, oscillating effect.

The beaded hangings of the doorway lifted, and a woman came into the patio, her feet moving in a creeping, half-dancing step.

She was beautiful. Her profile was Egyptian, her complexion of the upper Nile. Her teeth flashed white against the

painted red of her lips. Her body was strong and full of womanly suggestion beneath the webby veil of silk she wore.

Mr. Wentworth leaned forward holding his breath; Tommy whistled in low key and finished his drink; Shemeshal's eyes were bright, his nostrils distended, Marinez leaned back in his chair and smiled with owner's pride, and O'Neil was inscrutable.

The girl danced slowly, her muscles flowing with feline grace. It was the leopard dance of the White Nile. Her feet moved with the rhythm of the tom-toms, while her arms and body followed the balafron. Despite this, there was unity in her dance, like melody and counter-melody in symphonic composition.

By minute degrees the dance mounted in intensity. The girl smiled, contemplative, breathless through clenched teeth.

Suddenly the broken rhythm ceased. The balafron and tom-toms strode forward in unison. The girl's small, creeping movements vanished. She danced swiftly around the table, whirling, pausing momentarily at the close of each revolution to impart an oscillating effect to her silken veil.

Faster and faster beat the time. The eye could not follow the hands of the beaters so fast they went, and the girl danced, mounting to the tempestuous moment which, in the leopard dance, signifies the kill. Her veils were a multi-colored blur mingled with the brown skin of her body.

Shemeshal, breathless, leaned forward at the edge of his chair. A strange transformation had come over his face. No longer inscrutable, his lips were twisted with passion, his eyes were wide with vast amounts of white showing, the muscles of his neck were knotted as though by catalepsy.

With a final thunder the tom-toms stopped. The girl whirled to the last plinks of the balafron, cried sharply in an unknown tongue, and beat her palms overhead. The dance was over, and for the first time she looked at the men around the table.

Marinez shouted, "Ho! you like Seeva, my dancing girl?"

"Cripes!" exhaled Tommy.

Seeva came over, her lithe, brown body glowing with suggestion. She looked at each man, at Shemeshal least of all, and, scarcely breathing hard from her exertion, roosted on the table carelessly swinging

one leg. She lit a cigarette, inhaled to the last cubic inch of her lungs, and looked down on Tommy with eyes as soft as an antelope's. Tommy lifted his glass to drink, but leaning quickly across she seized his wrist and tilted the glass to her own lips.

"I have seen you some place, yes?" she asked.

"Me?"

"You have perhaps seen the dancing girls at Bushneveld?"

"I never saw a girl like you before," Tommy said fervently.

O'Neil growled, "Seeva, get your elbow out of my brandy."

She regarded O'Neil and asked Tommy, "Thees ugly hook-arm man, he is friend of yours?"

"I put up with him," Tommy apologized.

O'Neil said, "Take it easy, Tommy-lad, or I'll pack you up and ship you back to Coquilhatville."

"Now I have heem, you will not take heem away!" cried Seeva, accidentally knocking over Shemeshal's brandy so that it spilled in his lap. Shemeshal did not seem to notice. He just stared at her.

"You bet he won't take me away," agreed Tommy. Then, in his best Don Juan style, "Did anybody ever tell you you were beautiful, baby?"

"Oh Allah!" moaned O'Neil.

Seeva took Tommy by the hand and drew him away. "Come weeth me. I weel show you the stars that shine on Bushneveld . . ."

"Tommy, watch your step," warned O'Neil, and he wasn't fooling.

Tommy hesitated. He freed his hand to pour another drink.

Marinez laughed. "Come! Let us all drink, *senhors!*"

He stood a trifle drunkenly with his back against a potted shoe palm which was kept in the patio for its supposed power against yellow fever.

"Come!—see how beautiful is the bottom of the glass. You, *Senhor* O'Neil! Why do you not drink? Oh-ho! You perhaps fear for your young friend? Why do you not say, 'Go! We are children twice, but we have youth but once?'"

O'Neil watched while Seeva and Tommy strolled to the cool starlight of the veranda. When he looked back Marinez's glass was

empty. Empty—though he knew it had never been lifted to his lips.

"Come, up with the bottom!" roared Marinez.

"Sure!" O'Neil answered. He walked to the pot which held the shoe palm and emptied the drink.

Suddenly Marinez was no longer tipsy. He licked his thick lips and spoke in a rather husky voice,

"Believe me, *senhor*, I am sorry. As you see, I have had enough. Still the host must drink with guests, no?" He lifted his shoulders expressively. "And that is why I poured the drink away."

"Sure," grunted O'Neil, his face the old Buddah mask.

Marinez, recognizing the nature of O'Neil's suspicion, strode to the table and lifted high the brandy bottle.

"You suspect—many things. Dope? Poison? But watch!"

He poured a brimming gobletful and took it in one magnificent gulp. He poured another and downed that, and still another. At the end he inhaled with a mighty gasp.

"See! I have prove myself, no?"

"Good drinking, Marinez," said O'Neil.

Conversation lagged for a while. Shemeshal watched the veranda without seeming to be aware of anything that had happened.

MARINEZ broke the silence in a voice which, for him, was singularly unanimated, "You are a suspicious man, O'Neil. Your suspicion is always with you. It is a way of life. You see, I am the judge of character, no? You suspect me for pouring liquor in my poor shoe palm. You suspect that I kept my friend Ladue drunk in order to gain his interest in Bondele. But should not I have the suspicion, too? Have you told all, *senhor?*"

O'Neil watched Shemeshal capture a dragonfly and calmly pull its legs out one by one.

Marinez cried, "Come, *Senhor* O'Neil, what is it makes Bondele valuable?"

"Mahogany!"

The bedrooms at Cilo were constructed long and narrow, so they would connect with both veranda and patio, thus allowing a free passage of air. The beds were of fresh linen stretched over wood frames, and the mosquito net which hung from the ceiling was filmy and newly starched.

"Ah!" sighed Tommy, trying out his bed.

"What did you and that dancing girl talk about?" asked O'Neil.

"Don't snoop into my love life, and don't call Seeva a 'dancing girl.'"

"Answer my question before I wring your scrawny neck."

"What did we talk about? Oh, the stars, the perfume of the askata flowers down in the garden."

"What did she ask you about Bendele?"

O'Neil could tell by Tommy's change of expression that she had asked something—and that he had told her something.

"Lay off, O'Neil. Seeva's a sweet kid. Besides—and don't laugh—I feel sorry for her. That parrot-beaked Shemeshal has the pants scared off from her."

"Did you mention the black mahogany?"

"For God's sake! Marinez is bound to find out as soon as we start lumbering anyhow. I can't see what difference it makes."

"Plenty. So long as he doesn't know what we're after he'll play along with us. When he knows, he'll try to tie us up like he has every other concession along the Ncimbo."

"Oh hum!" yawned Tommy, lighting a smoke.

A sound from the direction of Mr. Wentworth's room made them listen. A few seconds later the little man rushed in. He gulped a few times trying to speak.

O'Neil said, "I can see it in your face. You've been frisked."

"The black mahogany box—it's gone!"

O'Neil seemed to have expected this. His expression didn't even change. He just got up and led the way back to Mr. Wentworth's room. He looked around without seeing anything of interest.

"You and Tommy wait here till I get back," he said. "I'm going to have a look around."

O'NEIL was fairly certain someone was watching him, so, to furnish an excuse for his prowling, he went to the patio and got the half bottle of brandy which had been left on the table. He climbed back with it, but instead of going to his room, he turned a corner of the veranda, hooked one of the supports, and swung quietly up to lie on the thatched roof.

He had been there only a minute or two when Marinez walked by, humming a

popular tune. He went to his room. It was quiet then, with no sound except the night sounds of the jungle—the chatter of night birds, the whir of insects, the unearthly cry of a carrion-hunting hyena.

O'Neil lay on his side, looking at the extremely brilliant universe of stars. He remembered what Marinez had said early that evening:

"... The jungle, *senhors!* It is ugly and hot—but it can be beautiful, too. The single shaft of sunlight falling through the roof of the great forest like a ray through a broken chink in a cathedral window, the quiet tread of a stalking leopard, the surge of a great river, the flame throat of an orchid which eats of death, the glittering stars . . ."

Peculiar fellow, Marinez. Damned peculiar . . .

He heard someone moving softly around the veranda. It was not a sound so much as an almost imperceptible vibration, a sway of the lightly built veranda. There was quiet for a while, and then O'Neil noticed it again. Soon there was a little sound on the stairs, and a minute later he glimpsed a white-clad form moving across the yard. It was a man, but beyond that he could tell nothing.

"Have any visitors?" O'Neil asked when he returned to Mr. Wentworth's room.

"No," Tommy answered.

"Somebody had a visitor."

They went around the veranda and glanced in O'Neil's room. It was just as he had left it. They looked in Tommy's room, and there, sticking its hilt in the pillow, was an ebony-handled dagger.

"Tommy," said O'Neil, a smile twisting his Buddha face, "you have been warned!"

O'Neil went to bed and snored. Tommy rolled with nightmare and awoke cursing Marinez's liquor, while poor Mr. Wentworth stared all night at the blackness of his ceiling.

When Mr. Wentworth arose, something made him look once more through his valise. There, in its old place beneath his linen trousers, was the little mahogany box. He couldn't imagine when it had been put back, and the more he wondered about it, the more frustrated he became. He showed up for breakfast hollow-eyed and without appetite.

IV

"THE Transcontinental Termite," as the English have dubbed the narrow-gauge rail line which connects with Chapleauville, consists of a "main line," sixty kilometers in length, and a collection of spurs. The longest of these spurs is the one running to Bondele. It is fifteen kilometers long, and was put through jungle and over swamp at no small expense.

Although several years had passed since the spur had been traveled, O'Neil found it was still serviceable. However, Bondele's teakettle locomotive gave him more doubt. After working on it for a week, putting in longer hours than a white man should, he scrubbed the grease from his hands with a wad of waste and announced to Bobolongonga, his helper, that the pistons should work provided the boiler stood pressure.

Bolongonga, a magnificent black with the most massive shoulders between Chapleauville and the rapids of Nkoi, agreed with this as with all statements made by O'Neil.

"*Vari!* You speak *much* true, *Monsieur*. *Sin!* Your wisdom it is wise!" Bobolongonga was a traveled man, having worked as a grease-monkey in one of the Lake Keva froth-flotation mills. There he had picked up many tongues of the white man.

"I am wise indeed," said O'Neil. "And I am strong, too. Behold! I could drive this hook of mine through the very steel of this boiler, and indeed I will drive it through the skull of that ne'er-do-well Tommy if he does not locate that black mahogany, and very soon."

"Ay! ay!" chanted Bobolongonga who took all of O'Neil's statements at face value. "Ay! you are *il bonde-moke*, you are *un grande nkoi!*"

"I am more than a leopard, Bobolongonga. I am also a K of P!"

"Ay! Ay!" grinned Bobolongonga, rocking to and fro with admiration.

O'Neil was lucky to have Bobolongonga. He was experienced in the ways of a wrench, and furthermore he was willing, even during siesta time, to work inside the boiler of the locomotive which attained heats no less than twelve degrees centigrade, lower than a Vermont preacher's hell—

Then, when the long shadows came, Bobolongonga shed his white pants which were taboo in the presence of the fetish, and disappeared into the bush. With darkness the drums would start, tom-toms with the high pitch of tight-drawn monkey skin, down to the bass rumble of elephant hide. To these Bobolongonga danced all night.

One day O'Neil asked him when he slept, and Bobolongonga rolled his eyes and answered cryptically,

"Ikete has much power!"

The locomotive responded in a satisfactory manner, and as a treat O'Neil took Bobolongonga to Chapleauville and back. But the combined skill of the two was unavailing in the case of the Caterpillar.

They tore it down, O'Neil analyzed its trouble, then, after satisfying himself that Tommy was not likely to turn up with any of the black mahogany, he made another run to Chapleauville. He laid around the discouraged little town until he was lucky enough to pick up a tiny missionary steamer bound for Leopoldville.

At Leopoldville he found repairs for the Caterpillar, then, as he had a few days before the scheduled return of the missionary boat, he took the railroad around the cataracts to Matadi. From Matadi he cabled the veneering firm of Anderson and Berg in Stockholm, and received an answer the same day assuring him they were interested in cedrelas heartwood of Gaboon quality, especially in the novelty grains which were not coming regularly from Dakar these days. The price, dealing direct, was half again better than selling to commission merchants at Matadi, and O'Neil, after computing costs, decided that Bondele might actually operate at a profit.

In the morning he received a second cablegram from Anderson and Berg offering a premium of Gaboon which showed floral pattern, ribbon grain, or fiddleback when quartersawed, provided logs were cut in lengths not less than four meters, and provided further than the logs were delivered in Stockholm not later than March first. If O'Neil, as president of Bondele Associates, Ltd., would sign an agreement of delivery at Matadi's Banque par Actions, he would in the course of the next twenty-four hours receive a cable draft for 3,000 guilders as evidence of Anderson and Berg's good faith.

O'Neil, who disliked agreements, decided that 3,000 guilders would come in so handy that he went straight to the Banque par Actions and signed.

When he finally got back to Leopoldville the Mission boat had left without him. He was another five days getting a steamboat to Coquilhatville, and there he was reduced to the extremity of hiring dugout canoes to transport himself and his repair parts to Chapleauville. Thus three weeks were consumed before he ran the locomotive back to Bondele.

HE expected some changes when he arrived, but if anything the place was more overgrown and discouraged than ever. Neither Tommy nor Mr. Wentworth were around, but the big Senegalese, Motala, was seated in a chair on the sagging veranda, smoking one of O'Neil's cigars.

Motala did not look up when O'Neil approached. He puffed phlegmatically and stared off across the clearing. Perhaps his eyelids drooped a trifle more balefully than usual, but that was all.

"Where's Tommy?" O'Neil demanded.

Motala did not move, so O'Neil repeated, "Where's Tommy?"

"Nis-enni," he grunted.

"When I ask in English, you answer in English!"

"You want heem, you fin' heem."

O'Neil reached out with his toe and flipped the chair from under Motala who struck with a heavy thud.

Had any other person in all the Congo done this thing, Motala would have twisted the life from him with his bare hands. But this was the man with the hook arm, so Motala spat out his crumpled cigar and said:

"The white men, they have gone to Cilo."

O'Neil thrust his hook beneath Motala's nose. "Next time I see you on Bondele I'll cleave thy skull with this. Remember that, you *baskava*! You thrice son of a pig. You essence of camel's dung!"

Surely, with head low between his massive shoulders, Motala moved across the plantation yard and disappeared into the bush.

Tommy and Mr. Wentworth were half an hour deep in siesta when O'Neil reached Cilo. He allowed Mr. Wentworth to sleep, for the little man looked as though he

needed it, but he kicked the cot from under Tommy in about the same manner as he had treated Motala a short time before.

When Tommy objected, O'Neil cursed him. When Tommy replied in kind, O'Neil threatened him with his hook.

"You tropical tramp!" railed O'Neil. "Get me waltzed into a treadmill, and then you lay down on the job. It's that hula dancer, isn't it? You can't stay away from her."

"Now, O'Neil. You know me. I can take my women or leave 'em alone. It's just that I've decided there's not a damn cent to be made in mahogany."

"Who told you that?"

"I found it out by myself."

"And from Marinez, after he'd poured you full of cognac!"

Tommy rubbed his chin the way he had a habit of doing when something was true and he didn't want to admit it. "Have a sundowner, O'Neil?"

O'Neil needed one. "Any daggers in the pillow lately?"

"No, nor in me either." Tommy slapped the automatic in the hip pocket of his shorts. "But I've been keeping little Ethyl handy."

O'Neil snorted.

"Twenty-five calibre. I'd as soon point my finger and go 'bang!'"

Tommy didn't want to leave Cilo, but O'Neil was unflinching. They awakened Mr. Wentworth and were about ready to start when Marinez came around the veranda, red-eyed from sleep.

"You are starting the lumbering?" he asked O'Neil.

"Yes."

Marinez downed a jolt of brandy and said, "Do not forget I am a partner, too, in Bondele. I may speak, yes? It is thus—Bondele would bankrupt the millionaire. I will sink no moneys into it. If you operate, it will be without my help."

Marinez no longer smiled. His words were abrupt. He seemed evil tempered as men often are when arising too early from siesta. He spat across the veranda rail and poured more brandy.

O'Neil said, "Then you won't expect a cut of the profits."

"Ha! You speak like the fool! There will be no profit." He took down half the second glass and smiled a little. "But perhaps there is something I do not know

about Bondele. Perhaps you have the special *kind* of mahogany, no?"

"Like that box you lifted from Mr. Wentworth's valise?"

Marinez made no denial. He merely kept his thick lips twisted in a smile.

"No, Marinez. I'm drawing to a low pair."

"Ho! You speak in poker, the Americano's parable. But *if* you should make the pair a full house, then, of course, Marinez will be there for his share." Then in the old ingratiating tone, "Tell me, my friend, where do you find the black mahogany?"

"Sure, I'll tell you that. Just as soon as you tell me how you can live like a rajah trading a ton of palm nuts and six bags of jackass copal a year!"

THREE days later the first great mahogany tree tore its way to earth on the cutting grounds. It was trimmed, sawed in segments, and transported to the jungle road by gangs of natives using ropes and a rolling hitch. The Caterpillar, pulling in fine style after rejuvenation in the form of new block, pistons, camshaft and numerous smaller parts, hauled these segments and the ones which followed down the zig-zag trail, over a narrow dike built between two miasma-infested sloughs, and deposited them beside the track at Bondele.

O'Neil continually prodded for speed, for it would be impossible to move logs after the strong rains of December.

One afternoon he came down from the cutting grounds in time to see a woman step ashore from a dugout canoe which a couple of natives had nosed to the landing. The woman was Seeva. He took a short-cut and intercepted her.

"Where to, Seeva?"

"To the house perhaps. Eet is the friendly visit."

"We don't encourage friendly visits."

She rubbed one bare shoulder seductively against his arm and looked up at him with great, soft eyes. Unlike most African women, Seeva bathed. With soap. And her hair was redolent of distilled-petal perfume of the sort made by Armenians in Telfu. Because he was tempted, O'Neil became more brash.

"I know why you're here, so get back to Cilo."

"Why *am* I here?"

"Because Marinez sent you."

"Why should he send me?"

"For the same reason he sicked you onto Tommy in the first place."

"Phouf!"

"So get back in your boat and beat it."

She elevated her nose and strode calmly up the path to the house. When O'Neil went up half an hour later she was sitting on the arm of Tommy's chair, combing his locks with her fingers and seeing to it his glass was full.

O'Neil said, "Send her home, Tommy."

But Tommy only smiled and shook his handsome head. "Ah, O'Neil! You should not forget the words of the Prophet. 'A guest in the tent is an obligation near sacred.' And I'm the type of man who never shirks his obligations."

"Trouble follows the woman," says a proverb, antedating the words of "the Prophet" by perhaps two thousand years. Trouble followed the woman to Bondele. It sat waiting inside Tommy's bedroom the night following Seeva's arrival.

When Tommy stepped inside the dark room and commenced feeling around for a pack of cigarettes he realized someone else was there. No "seventh sense passed down from some prehistoric ancestor"—it was definite and olfactory, a mixture of rank perfume and sweat one finds emanating from the men of Asia Minor.

Tommy felt around the table as though intending to light the petrol lamp. He knew it was too late to withdraw, so he continued to move slowly, showing no hint of alarm. A sudden move, he knew, would call for a strike from the upraised hand of man, just as from the poisoned head of a cobra. Tommy quietly whistled a popular tune he had picked up from the gramophone at Cilo.

A rustle of clothing warned him of the attack. He thrust the table toward the sound and moved swiftly aside. The table bumped something, the lamp skidded and crashed to pieces on the floor.

Tommy found himself against the wall, untangling the tiny .25 calibre automatic from the hip pocket of his shorts. He stood still, gun in hand, waiting for a sound, or for a shadow. The heat of day was still heavy, and the odor of petrol made it almost unbearable.

He listened—not for footsteps because the jungle damp had rendered the floor muggy so that walking across it was like walking on cork—but for more subtle hints of movement, the rustle of clothing, the stir of air.

When the time came he didn't know what it was that warned him—he just knew the man was coming for him, and the automatic jumped to life spitting streaks of orange-colored flame.

His assailant had not expected the gun. He retreated, diving shoulder first through the net-covered window. Tommy ran to the veranda, but by that time the man had leaped to the ground, and a few seconds later he was a white-clad form dimly visible among the cape jasmine bushes which edged the cassava patch. It might have been a daylight shot of O'Neil's Luger, but still Tommy aimed his ridicuolus little gun and pulled the trigger. The pin fell with a dry click.

O'Neil was at the cutting grounds, so he did not hear of the encounter until he navigated the cat down the following day. It was then he quoted the Egyptian adage about trouble following the woman . . .

V

THE art of Ikete, witch doctor of the Bondele native village, was as old as the fears of man. Ikete's charms for battling the black devil of rat fever, the red devil of smallpox, and the pale, blue devil of sleeping sickness were good, for they had been proved good long before Cleopatra discovered the luxury of Rome. But though Ikete knew well the value of his ancient charms, dances and incantations, it would be incorrect to say that more modern discoveries had passed him by. Certain items stored in his little igloo-shaped fetish hut would prove they had not.

For instance, inside a monkey's skull miraculous for its power in the healing of yaws, was aspirin which Ikete had found to be powerful charm against the devil of headache which came from long hours of chanting in the overheated huts of the dead. And he also kept carbolic acid, the burning water which drove out toothache, and laudanum which was good for just about everything.

And Ikete knew of another charm of

the white man, a charm as powerful it made these things seem as nothing, for with it could be secured women, and rich food shut up inside cans, and liquor ten times as strong as millet wine. Furthermore, if a man had enough of it, Ikete had been told, he would even have power over life and death.

Ikete kept his store of this charm, which came in the form of round silver and little scraps of paper, inside the sacred ram's horn beneath the untouchable robe of bat's fur at the most secret corner of the fetish hut.

He worshipped it even more than he did Sabata, the fetish of his choice, and he plotted continually for its increase.

His greatest windfall came when Marinez of Cilo built the road the year before. At that time Ikete had made the fetish speak out against the high wage of eight francs per day with the result it was cut to four, with Marinez and himself splitting the difference. So, when Bondele hired men at the old rate of eight francs, it was only logical that Ikete should visit the new master—an ugly man with one arm only, the other sprouting an iron hook.

Ikete crouched on the ground, speaking in the singsong chant of his craft:

"Eight francs much-much," he chanted sadly, weaving from side to side. "Much-much, bad for black man. I have heard it in dark moon, bad for black man. I have seen it in fire flame, bad for black man." Ikete's bones were almost fleshless, his arms dangled from his shoulderblades like dried corpses on a gibbet, his collarbone protruded, leaving deep hollows, and the only thing about him that seemed alive were his eyes which rolled as he chanted.

"What's the deal, Ikete?" O'Neil asked.

"Much money bad. Ke! ke! much bad. Eight francs you make four francs. So say Sabata. Sabata will speak by moonlight."

"And where do you come in?"

"Ke! ke! I have nothing. Sabata have all. You pay Sabata two francs, you keep two francs. Sabata will keep men at work. You pay Ikete one hundred francs now, Ikete go to Sabata—"

"You go to hell!"

Ikete kept chanting so O'Neil shouted it—"Go to hell!"

The witch doctor's manner suddenly

changed. He leaped up, crouching, and spat at O'Neil's feet.

"A curse to you. In the name of Sabata . . ." And he backed away into the creepers of the jungle, casting maledictions in the unknown fetish tongue.

Ikete left longing for revenge, but he longed for the charm of money still more. He plotted to obtain both. Knowing that Marinez was anxious to close Bondele and all other plantations along the Ncimbo river, Ikete appeared at Cilo that same day and suggested that, for a consideration, Sabata might call the long dances to lay the devils of disease, thus tying up O'Neil's labor force until the rainy season came.

At dawn he returned to his fetish hut, gloatingly stuffed paper and silver inside the sacred ram's horn beneath the untouchable robe of bat's fur, and through the day he crouched in the close mud hut, beating the bladder-drum of incantation, and chanting words in the fetish language.

Few men worked in mahogany that day, few women cut cassava in the field. They gathered in awed groups outside the hut and listened.

Next day commenced the long dances to lay the devils of disease.

O'Neil found Donomey, the old fat chief of the village, resting after five hours in the dance, and offered to raise wages. Donomey was friendly, but he refused. He feared Ikete and the fetish. Perhaps, he said, it would be possible to please the fetish with money. But O'Neil was stubborn. He willed Donomey, Ikete, and all of them to the fires which never end, and journeyed across the river to the village of chief Ngando who came with all his warriors when promised the usual wages, plus a bonus in the form of the ornaments which could be beaten from the brass of all the old steam fittings in the repair shop.

They worked while Donomey's people danced. For three days it was thus. On the morning of the fourth day O'Neil came along in the Caterpillar to find that a fetish house of sticks and fresh mud had been built in the narrowest place along the dike which separated the two swamps. The black devil of fever, Ikete had told them, arose from the green waters of those swamps, and it was here the dances must progress.

"Move your damned camp to one side,"

shouted O'Neil, striding unannointed into the dancing circle.

Ikete crouched among the tom-toms, eyes rolling back into his skull. "*Anna-keke!*" he chanted.

O'Neil appealed to Donomey, but the old fat chief would not move against the fetish. Even Bobolongonga who had traded his adjustable wrench for the lance of his ancestors, and his white man's pants for a skirt of pink-dyed raffia, could not be lured from the circle.

O'Neil soon had enough of arguing. He remounted the lofty seat of the Caterpillar, let out the clutch, and advanced under full throttle. With a mighty roar of exhaust the monster rolled across the ceremonial fire sending dancers fleeing into the swamps. It demolished tom-toms and grigris, and drove on directly for the holy of holies, the mud hut of Sabata.

The natives watched, confidently expecting O'Neil and caterpillar both to dissolve in blue flame, but no such thing took place. The cat mounted the sloping wall of the hut for a meter or so, and then the home of Sabata collapsed in a heap of mud, sticks and straw.

Thus lay shattered not only the mud hut, but also much of the power of Ikete. Donomey, who long had resented the witch doctor's power, ordered his men back to the cutting grounds.

BUT Ikete was not yet licked. He retreated to his old hut in the village, chanted to the fetish throughout an afternoon and a night, and appeared with the untouchable robe of bat's fur around his shoulders and an ancient calibash turned over his head. Thus equipped, he commenced praying O'Neil to death.

"*Nijji-fe-bowa,*" chanted Ikete, "The curse of Sabata upon him."

Work stopped again. Even subjects of Chief Nganda spent their days near the fetish hut awaiting the result.

It was soon noticed that O'Neil had dropped from sight. A houseboy from Bondele brought word that he had sickened and lay all day in his hammock. Ikete chanted with new enthusiasm, and Donomey, repenting his haste, issued a useless order against working at the cutting grounds. Rumors were many. O'Neil's brown skin had turned green. His flesh

had run away leaving him only skin stretched over skeleton, and his hook arm had sprouted a branch of poison ninga, leaves, berries and all.

Actually, O'Neil had chosen this poorest of all times to go down for his yearly bout with the fever. After five days he got up and ministered to himself with whiskey. It was then Tommy told him about Ikete's machinations.

O'Neil did not know it at the time, but even his arising had strengthened the belief in Ikete.

It is thus—according to the Sabata fetish, the man being prayed to death will at first sleep and waste away. Then, when the proper moment arrives, the anointed of Sabata takes the calibash from his head and has brought to him a cockerel. Uttering certain words, he breaks one and then the other of the cockerel's legs, after which he holds the poor bird overhead. For a long time it is thus with the witch doctor staring at the cockerel's bill, and speaking in the fetish language. At last a drop of blood appears at the cockerel's bill and falls, striking the witch doctor's tongue. When that drop of blood falls, the victim must arise, be he fifty kilometers away, and hasten to the fetish hut where he must dance until he expires.

And so the links of circumstances which began with O'Neil's recurrence of the fever, now continued as he strode along the jungle trail toward the village. As he went, message drums gave out their rocking, speechlike rhythm.

ACRY went up from four hundred native throats when he appeared in the village clearing. A lane opened for him as he strode up to the ceremonial fire where Ikete, untrembling and triumphant, was holding aloft the dripping bird.

Ikete signaled with his lips, and the tom-toms throbbed the slow rhythm of the dance of death. But it was there the links of circumstance failed. O'Neil did not dance.

He strode on, booting tom-toms from his way, seized the cockerel from Ikete's hands, and commenced beating him over the head with it.

After a squawk or two the poor bird expired. O'Neil beat Ikete with the carcass until feathers flew. Ikete took it for a while, then he fled across the clearing and

along a jungle path with O'Neil in pursuit.

Next day Donomey ordered a full crew to the cutting grounds, and a young witch doctor was at the village gathering sticks to build a hut to Willilahau, the river fetish, who, he asserted, hastened the fermentation of millet and the fruitfulness of the harvest, and was, moreover, very powerful, having a hook arm.

Ikete, although defeated, still had revenge. His machinations had caused such delay it was apparent they could get out no sufficient quantity of correctly grained wood before the roads bogged down.

Then one morning Donomey came to camp followed by two of his tribesmen who carried a huge crotch of mahogany. It was waterlogged from the swamp, and the sapwood was rotting away, but the center of twisted grain was hard, and streaked deep brown and black.

Considerable of the black mahogany, all in deadfalls, had been revealed by the receding waters of the dry season. O'Neil said the sulphuric and copperas waters of the swamp had turned it that color, and it was a moral victory for the opinion he had expressed back in Coquilhatville. Still, the wood was worth good money, and it did not take him long to get crews on the ground to pull the logs and peel the rotting sapwood. Through the following weeks, as rains commenced and grew worse, threatening to mire the Catetripillar, O'Neil rushed the transport to Bondele . . .

O'Neil was so tired one night that he decided he would sleep in a hammock at the camp. He stretched out and had just closed his eyes when the sound of excited voices aroused him. A boy had broken up the nightly dance and was repeatedly shouting the name "Donomey."

O'Neil tried to learn what was wrong, but nobody seemed sure. He joined the torchlit group which followed the boy along the little-used jungle path. After four or five kilometers travel the uplifted torches revealed Donomey lying beside a nest of bulldog ants. O'Neil pushed through the circle and felt for the old man's pulse. Donomey was dead.

It was not death, but the manner of it which shocked O'Neil. The native boy had cut him down, but it was evident that the fat chieftan had been strung up by the thumbs, smeared with honey, and allowed

to dangle so his toes would just touch the four-foot high anthill.

So this was the penalty for Donomey's cooperation! A feeling of white anger burned through O'Neil.

An ancient native with gray wool hair danced on spindly legs and chanted. Others followed in broken rhythm. No ritual—they danced as an outlet for emotion.

O'Neil watched them carry Donomey's body to his hut which was soon filled with black men, one packed against another, perspiring, chanting the words of death. He could hear the rocking wail of their voices for a long time as he walked the path toward Bondele.

HE arrived at the house so quietly that two who were sitting on the veranda jumped when he spoke. As he expected, one was Seeva. The other, to his surprise, was Mr. Wentworth.

"When did you come down from Cilo?" O'Neil asked Seeva.

"Maybe-so after siesta."

"Who was there when you left?"

"Nobody. Jus' houseboy. So I get lonesome and come." She came close to O'Neil as she always did when she was after a favor. "Now that Seeva tell you true, you won't tell Tommy how long I'm here, no?"

"I won't tell him a damned thing."

"Ahem!" said Mr. Wentworth self consciously.

"When did you see Marinez and Shemeshal last?" O'Neil asked Seeva.

"Maybe las' night." She came closer than ever, rubbing herself against him with purring, feline seductiveness. "I don't want go back to Cilo. I want stay here all time. I am afraid at Cilo. I am good girl, M'shu. You let me stay I can help."

"Doing what?"

"I dance. Mix drink. Do you not like woman, M'shu? Was it not your prophet who say, 'Man does not live by bread alone?'"

"Where did you ever learn that?"

"At convent school of good Sisters of Charity in Motake."

"I can imagine you damned near any place except in a convent."

"Besides, if I stay, perhaps I can tell you things," she wheedled. "Marinez, I can say, he want all planation along river.

He's one who hire Ikete. He's one who have poison arrow shoot at Mr. Wentworth to scare him away. He's one offer money to Donomey for quit work, but Donomey answer 'no.' Then Marinez say maybe he shoot Donomey."

"When did you find all that out?"

"Shemeshal, I hear him tell Motala."

"You can stay," said O'Neil. . . .

The penetrating, high-frequency squeal of steam through a weighted safety valve brought O'Neil from his hammock at the hour of sunup two days later.

He looked down from his window and cursed. Bobolongonga, instead of building up a moderate pressure which would suit the age of the locomotive boiler, had stuffed the firebox with pitchwood and moved the valve weight out to the last notch.

O'Neil did not take time to cover his toenails with the customary adhesive in protection against the wet season's chiggers, he simply vaulted the railing as he was and ran down the path to open the safety valve. He was about to make his usual threat of splitting Bobolongonga's skull with his hook arm, when the sound of an exhaust drew his attention to the river. In a few seconds Marinez's launch came in sight, swinging in an arc to break its speed.

With an effort, Marinez heaved his considerable bulk to the dock. The other man in the boat was Motala. He made no move to come ashore, but sat, surly faced, looking at O'Neil.

"Ah!—I see you would haul log, my friend!" cried Marinez.

"As you see," answered O'Neil.

"But the railroad—perhaps you do not understand. It crosses the LaMotte ground below here, and LaMotte she belongs to me."

"And what of that?"

"I cannot allow it, *senhor*."

"But we have a legal right to cross."

Marinez was extremely sad. "Believe me, I am so sorry. But business she is, as you say, business. I forbid. The legal right our Colonial Administration must decide. If they say you pass, very well."

O'Neil knew that Coquilhatville would refer the matter to Leopoldville, and Leopoldville would pass it on to Brussels. An answer in two years would be fortunate.

"No hard feelings?" asked Marinez.

"I don't suppose you had any hard feelings toward Donomey, either!" shouted Tommy who had arrived in time to hear the last of Martinez's words. "I suppose that was business, too!"

"Donomey?" Martinez controlled his anger and put on an expression of sorrow. "You think I strung poor Donomey by the thumbs? No, this is not true. I perhaps try to hire him, perhaps even threaten—but the torture it is not me. I will kill, where necessary, but quick, with the bullet through the brain. This killing of Donomey was for two things—to make natives fear Bondele, and to make all men suspect me."

Martinez walked over to examine the mahogany loaded on the flatcars. "Is beautiful wood! Such color!—like the skin of Africa. This load, she is worth fortune, no?"

"No," answered O'Neil.

VI

MARTINEZ departed. Siesta passed. The sun disappeared into the bluish forest haze at its monotonous six o'clock. On the veranda Armless O'Neil, Tommy Huston and little Mr. Wentworth sat sipping whiskey and soda as though they were without plans for that night—or for eternity.

Twilight thickened into the peculiar, bluish quality of tropic night. They sat on, their positions revealed by the pin-point lights of their cigarettes, and by the occasional quiet laughter of Seeva who was with them.

When darkness was an hour deep, O'Neil sat up and kicked back his chair. "Bobolongonga!" he called in a voice that was not too loud.

Bobolongonga had been squatting by the locomotive. He made no answer. There was no need of it, for he knew what was expected of him. He opened the firebox, heaped in pitchwood, and defied fate and the instructions of O'Neil by dousing the wood and the still-hot grate with petrol. It was midnight before steam was up and everything was in readiness.

O'Neil told Mr. Wentworth to stay and "take care of Bondele," whatever that consisted of; he posted Tommy on the rear car with a rifle, gave the throttle to Bobolongonga, and mounted to the cowcatcher.

The heavily laden train moved slowly, unlighted, through the deep jungle shadow. It was six kilometers to the frontier of Bondele which was marked by a finger of swamp extending up from the river. They stopped at the edge of a long, wooden bridge while O'Neil lit the carbide headlight. It showed the rails stretching in reddish streaks, uninterrupted across the bridge and into the distant jungle. O'Neil grunted in a satisfied manner and lighted a cigarette. If Martinez had intended to destroy the line, this would have been the most likely spot.

He let the light remain on, and voiced no objection when Bobolongonga gave the engine another inch or two of throttle.

Congo days are long with fly-droning heat that seems destined to last without interruption for the remainder of time, but nights are cool with jewel-like clarity. After crossing the bridge O'Neil relaxed a little and commenced enjoying that night. It was pleasant feeling the air move past there on the cowcatcher, and he had just reached the yawning stage when something brought him up abruptly.

A white object had appeared for a moment perhaps two hundred meters down the track, then it dropped suddenly from view. O'Neil crouched a trifle through instinct just as something whanged the steel a foot or two over his head. Following like an echo was the report of a high-powered rifle.

Probably the bullet had been aimed high intentionally, but there was no point in taking a chance. O'Neil still had dreams of his little poolhall in Chicago. So, with a swing of his hook, he severed the copper tubing which supplied gas to the headlamp.

"Gun it!" he shouted to Bobolongonga.

There was no response. The engine still crept along at its miserable rate. Half a dozen rifles now opened up, and these weren't deliberately missing. Bullets clanged against the boiler steel and whined off into the dark. One of them loosened a rivet letting steam out with a high-pitched whistle.

O'Neil swung around the side and clambered into the cab. He found Bobolongonga, moaning with fear, crouched behind the iron face of the firebox. O'Neil trod over him and gave the engine full throttle.

The drivers answered with a series of violent revolutions, but there was little traction, and they were slow in gaining speed. Still, however slow they were moving, every second was bringing them closer. O'Neil was not the suicide type. He decided on retreat.

He booted Bobolongonga until the terrified black raised to hands and knees, then he hooked him by the collar and dragged him, begging and moaning, as far as the first flatcar.

Bobolongonga, finding himself in the open, recovered use of his legs. He fled along the logs until he reached the end car where Tommy waited. Tommy, defying death with a lighted cigarette, was happily waiting the proper moment to pay back bullets in kind.

O'Neil emptied his Luger in the general direction of the gun flashes, a piece of blind shooting intended to discourage a charge on the engine, then he, too, ran to the rear.

"Get down, you damned fool," he growled at Tommy, "and put out that cigarette."

Tommy ignored him. "O'Neil, you're getting jumpy as a titmouse."

O'Neil cursed him and cut the cigarette in half with a swing of his hook arm. They were picking up speed rapidly now. Gunfire and shouting voices were close, but all the bullets seemed to be aimed at the engine. They rode safely through the thick of it.

Marinez's voice boomed out in command, and all except one of the guns went silent. This cracked three more times, then no sound except the rattle of the train.

"What the hell?" O'Neil asked, and he got his answer.

There was a mighty, vibrating roar. The roadbed rolled beneath them, and the air became thick with dirt and flying fragments of wood. When it was over the train was still on the track, and still moving—but moving toward a ragged hole which had been torn in the roadbed a hundred meters further along.

"Jump!" O'Neil commanded, and neither Tommy nor Bobolongonga hesitated.

O'Neil did not follow them. He ran forward along the flatcars, made the cab at the end of a mighty leap, cut the throttle, and gave the engine all the brakes she had.

There was a howl of metal and the en-

gine slowed in a series of convulsive jerks. It seemed to halt at the very edge of the hole left by the explosion, but the momentum of the loaded flatcars inched it unwillingly forward. It nosed down, sank into the soft rubble of the depression, and settled gently over at a forty-five degree angle. The strain caused the throttle to release a little, the drivers responded with a few spasmodic revolutions, and she died there, heaving like a stricken warhorse.

O'Neil had not ridden her down. He had jumped a few meters back, but he came forward now to examine the situation and declare it hopeless.

"And just when I was getting attached to the damned little teakettle!" he moaned when Tommy and Bobolongonga came up.

"NOW what?" Tommy asked.

"Why, back to Bondele to see how things fare with Mr. Wentworth. Then to Cilo where I intend to put my hook through that Portuguese's skull."

It was a long walk to Bondele. They took siesta near the bridge, and it was evening when they trudged across the yard to the plantation house.

"Wentworth!" shouted O'Neil when he saw no one around.

"Seeva!" called Tommy.

She didn't answer, either. O'Neil ran up the steps and around the veranda. He came back to find Tommy reading a note which had been left on the table. There was a tight expression on Tommy's face that made O'Neil wonder. When he read the note he understood.

My dear friends:

Having received an excellent offer from Sr. Marinez for my interest in Bondele, I have decided to sell. Please do not think too harshly of me. It is just that I have become very homesick for England.

Yours sincerely,

HARVEY WENTWORTH.

P.S.—Miss Seeva, who will soon be Mrs. Wentworth, has gone with me.

H. W.

"Oh Allah!" muttered O'Neil, "what a swath that gal will cut through Chatham."

Tommy dropped weakly into a chair and called, "Bobolongonga! Bring whiskey."

O'Neil cursed Wentworth in a dutiful sort of way but without real ire. He didn't blame anybody for grabbing a chance to get out of a country which he admitted to be

the sump-hole of creation. Tommy poured whiskey and almost wept.

"I loved her, O'Neil. I don't know when I ever loved a woman so much, unless maybe it was that Dutch gal over in Mafiti."

"You're damned well rid of her," O'Neil barked, caring nothing whatever for the delicacy of Tommy's feelings.

Tommy moaned, "I could see she felt motherly toward him. I should have suspected something then."

"You fiddle-playing fathead."

O'Neil hunted out a cold lunch of bully beef and cassava bread, after which he announced he was ready to start to Cilo.

"Come on, Tommy. Maybe a stray bullet will put you out of your misery."

They reached the house at Cilo about midnight, but nobody was around except the houseboy. The houseboy protested that Marinez had left after siesta, but O'Neil satisfied himself by searching the place. He dragged Tommy away from Marinez's brandy and went to the plantation village where the nightly dance was in progress. Stimulated by a couple of francs, an old crone recalled seeing Marinez, Shemeshal and Motala walking along the road which led from the dock to the old warehouses. That had been about dark.

"Let them go to the devil," said Tommy. "I'd rather go up to the house and revenge myself on his fancy liquor."

O'Neil ignored the suggestion and led the way along a dark, little-used roadway. It took them half an hour to find the warehouses, now abandoned and almost lost beneath the undergrowth.

"I told you it was a damned fool trip," said Tommy when they failed to find a light, or a sign of anyone.

O'Neil didn't answer. He was listening. A sound resembling some strange animal came from the direction of a shed almost buried beneath ochilla weed. It was a monotonous sound, like panting breath, a throat rattle and a groan all in one.

They moved cautiously around the weed patch and took a path into the overhanging jungle. It was dense for a while, then the foliage opened up and they were at the edge of a little clearing. The moonlight, filtering through a huge bokangu tree revealed that something hung from one of its lower branches.

It was Marinez, bound, smeared with

honey, and hanging by his thumbs so his toes just touched a hill of bulldog ants.

O'Neil cut him down and beat the insects away.

"Light a fire," he told Tommy. "We'll see how bad they got him."

Marinez sat up and moaned. "Ah, you! They have killed me, no?"

"No," answered O'Neil. "You'll live with the help of some ointment, though I can't see why I should give a damn."

"Ah, my thumbs! My poor legs! Never did the martyrs suffer as I suffered. But you have save me, and I live. Perhaps it is the justice of poetry, no? Me, Marinez, try to ruin you, and you put me in life-long debt."

"Is that poetry? Who strung you up here, anyway?"

"Who but Shemeshal, and his pig of a helper, Motala. And why? I will tell you, despite my misery. Because I sell my own property—that dancing girl. The same Seeva he was so jealous for that he would kill all who look at her. Ah, it is an unjust world."

"So you traded Seeva for Wentworth's interest in Bondele!"

"And paid five thousand francs to boot!"

"Quiet down, Marinez. If Tommy finds out about it he'll want to give you back to the ants."

TOMMY had his fire going in a heap of dry thatch. It blazed high, lighting the clearing. He was standing there, watching the flame, when the report of a gun rang out. Tommy spun and fell from the impact of the bullet. He was down, but not unconscious. He had presence of mind to crawl to the shadow of a clump of weeds.

O'Neil drew his pistol and leaped to the protection of the tree, but Motala appeared behind him, a high-powered rifle leveled.

"You weel not trick me thees time, hook-arm!" he gloated. "No, thees time it is I, Motala, who laugh last."

"Shoot, you fool!" commanded Shemeshal, appearing among a rubble of ruined native huts.

Motala would have obeyed, but the spiteful crack of Tommy's little automatic made him spin around. The bullet had missed, but the diversion was all O'Neil needed. He dove, head forward, for Motala.

Motala tried to aim, but O'Neil was beneath the rifle barrel. He swung the barrel at O'Neil's skull, and that didn't work, either. O'Neil took a glancing blow on the shoulder, doubled the Senegalese with a right to the solar plexis, and came over with the hook. Motala went down.

When Motala dropped his rifle, Marinez pounced on it. Shemeshal saw him and fired, but the bullet was a meter or two wide of the mark. Missing the shot caused him to lose his nerve. He shot again, more wildly than before, and fled for the protection of the jungle.

MARINEZ came slowly to a sitting posture. He was a long time getting the rifle to his shoulder. It seemed that Shemeshal would surely escape, but at the last moment, just as he was disappearing into the dark jungle, the gun leaped in Marinez's hands, and Shemeshal tossed his arms and collapsed like a cloth dummy.

Marinez made it to his feet and walked to where Shemeshal had fallen. Tommy, somewhat recovered from the shock of a flesh wound in the hip, hobbled over, too.

"See?" smiled Marinez. "Did I not once tell you I was the humane man? Did I do as another might have done? Did I shoot him through the bowels so he would suffer through the heat of siesta? No. I shoot him in the temple. Is good, no?"

An hour later Marinez lay in his hammock treating himself with brandy, and almost weeping to think of how he had mistreated Tommy and O'Neil. He was so repentant that he offered 200,000 francs for their interest in Bondele, and O'Neil, after reserving the right to fallen timber, accepted.

"Alas, what do I care for money?" sighed Marinez. "It is that I feel sad, and I wish my soul to be at peace. It is not long I have on this world, *senhors*. The torture of the ants, it has done something to me. One year I have left—with plenty of liquor, perhaps three. Yes, I am weak with generosity. I will agree. Let us sign the papers. Where are you going? To Europe—Portugal, perhaps? In Lisbon, burn a candle for me. . . ."

It was midway in the rains. The muggy heat of Coquilhatville seemed to possess measureable viscosity. No white man

should be asked to endure it—but, thank God, O'Neil was on his way out.

"Feisal, you son of a pig," shouted O'Neil, banging the table with his hook, "is there no ice to serve with this vile brandy?"

Mohammed bowed his way over to the table where Tommy and O'Neil were sitting and clasped his hands in a histrionic expression of regret.

"Ah, Masters, it is the ice machine—"

"Don't give us that old stall about it being in Leopoldville."

"Having its bearings reground!" Mohammed stretched his arms toward Mecca. "O Allah, in thy day of judgment, behold that administrator who ships away our ice machine and curses us with taxes."

"Just bring us the water," sighed O'Neil.

Mohammed pulled the cap from the bottle of water with a flourish and asked, "Have you been at Bondele, O hook-armed one?"

"At Bondele."

"Then your pieces of gold must be as the stars in the firmament."

"Why?"

"Because of the grand lorry road coming over from the oil fields, and the pipeline, too, not to speak of the new channel being dredged by the government one hundred kilometers above Chapleauville. It is the work of the soap corporation, Masters, the same corporation which has poured gold into the lap of that infidel Portuguese, Pablo Marinez. But you are rich—"

"Hold on!" cried Tommy. "Lorry road? Pipeline? O'Neil, did you hear that? That damned Marinez beat us out after all. Burn a candle for him in Lisbon, he says! Why, I'll—"

"Sit down!" barked O'Neil. "Let him have Bondele and be damned. We have two hundred thousand francs, which is the equal of six thousand good, round American dollars. And here's something else—we're on our way out. Get that?—out! And he's still rotting away in this unholy jungle. I say that leaves us winner regardless of the rate of exchange."

O'Neil downed his brandy and made a wry face.

"May Allah have mercy on him!" he concluded.

"*Allah-humma!*" chanted Mohammed in response, rearranging the bottles along the backbar. "*Salli alayh!*"

RED ROGUE KILLER

By DAY KEENE

All the jungle shrieked the red-bearded god's cruelty. Men died in his terror-kraal—the living flesh stripped from their bodies. And now this girl, lovely and young, had come into his district of death, begging to be taken to him, claiming he was her brother.

THE big American strode out of the bush onto the station parade ground at Katumbo exactly at high noon. Noiselessly at Carter's heels padded Nylabo, the black.

Behind Carter lay twelve days of hell. His boots were straps of leather. His shirt and trousers had been torn to flying tatters by the wilderness of desiccated thorn scrub through which he had trekked. A battered, once white, sun helmet was pushed far back on his forehead exposing grizzled curls plastered to his head with sweat. His face was lined with strain and burned black by the sun. A stubble covered his jowls. He wore a heavy Colt strapped to one thigh. Africa had made a man out of the callow young doctor who had disembarked at Angola almost ten years before.

The grateful back country natives called him *Bwana Juju*. Unscrupulous white traders, Arab slavers, and wealthy big game hunters had called him lots of things.

But for a few bare-footed native soldiers drowsing in the midday heat, the unkempt parade ground was deserted. Beyond the company manager's squat, white, tin-roofed office he could see the monthly mail boat tied up at the wharf.

A sudden wave of nostalgia swept him. In ten days he could be in Brazza-ville. In ten more he could be in Angola. In another two weeks, if he was lucky, he could be back in New York. He could be clean and cool and safe.

Beside him, worried, Nylabo asked, "We have not come this long way for *boori*, Bwana?"

"No." Carter shook his head. "We haven't come this long way for nothing."

He licked at his heat-parched lips and strode on. Ismail, the snag-toothed Arab interpreter, was squatted on his heels in

the shade outside of Maastricht's door. He stood up as Carter neared him and intoned, "In the name of God, peace be with you."

Carter had never liked the man. He was too oily. "And with you," he answered shortly.

After the glare of the sun, the office was cool and dark. Maastricht stood up to greet him. "This iss a pleasure, doctor. I was about to send an escort after you."

Nylabo squatted on his heels just outside the door, his tawny eyes appraising the slim young memsahib whom his *Bwana*, blinded by the sudden darkness, had not as yet seen.

ISMAIL moved as if to close the door, eyed the razor-sharp *assegai* cradled in Nylabo's arms, and changed his mind. If *Bwana Juju* was a devil, Nylabo was his shadow. Where the white man walked, the black man followed.

Inside the office, Carter stared at the Belgian, puzzled. "You were about to send an escort after me? Then the last runners I sent you got through! You know, then?"

A slow-moving stolid man, Maastricht sat back in his chair and dry-washed his fat palms together. "Know what? What are you talking about? What—?" He checked himself, stood up. "Pardon me, Miss Sutliff. Doctor Carter, may I present you to Miss Sutliff."

Carter brushed a sun blackened hand across his eyes. *The girl wasn't real. She couldn't be. She was a part and parcel of the nightmare through which he had been moving for the last three months.*

The girl's fingers were cool and soft in his. "I'm real," she assured him. "But I am a long way from home."

He released her fingers and apologized.



"Pardon me if I stared at you like a *takata* one. But I've been through enough in the last ninety days to make me crazy."

The company manager stared at him sharply. "You are not yourself, Doctor." He fumbled in a drawer. "Perhaps a taste of schnapps. . . ."

Carter waved the bottle aside. "Later. Right now I've got to talk to you. Alone."

Ellen Sutliff shook her head. "I won't leave this office until you agree to take me back in with you. I've traveled eight thousand miles to reach here. And I won't give up now. I won't."

Carter reached the bottle from the desk and gulped a drink. "Perhaps I *am* crazy," he admitted.

The girl continued. "You don't know me. But I know you, by reputation. And shortly before you arrived, Mr. Maastricht informed me that you are the only man in the Belgian Congo, perhaps in all of Africa who can help me."

Carter stood fingering the butt of his gun. "I haven't the least idea what you are talking about."

"Her brother was Barney Sutliff," Maastricht told him.

"Oh," Carter said. He had heard of the soldier of fortune many times but he had never met him. The last he had heard of the man his plane had reputedly crashed on a flight from Durban to Cairo.

"I've traced Barney's route," the girl said quietly. "He was seen over Lake Tanganyika. But he never reached Stanleyville. That means that he must have crashed somewhere in The Valley of the Lost Ones."

"Then he's dead," Carter told her shortly.

"I don't believe that," she cried. "And I want to outfit a safari to bring him out. You can name your own price to lead it. Mr. Maastricht informs me that you are the only white man whom the natives will allow into the valley."

Carter shook his head. "What you ask is impossible. That whole back country has gone mad. That's why I'm here." He slipped a leather hypodermic case from his pocket and shook out two polished darts on Maastricht's desk.

The girl reached for one and he slapped her hand. "That's sudden death," he warned her. "They missed me by hairs,"

he continued. "It would seem that someone, whoever is behind this, didn't want me to come out." He poked at the blow gun darts with a pencil. "That one is a poisoned *kalchi* thorn. From the varnished look of the other one I imagine that it was steeped in stropanthin extracted from the *Kombé* bean."

MAASTRICHT had gone white-faced. "But I don't understand."

"Neither do I," Carter admitted curtly. "It began four months ago with a furtive raid on a *Ngoma*. Twenty *Nditos*—maidens—were stolen from that dance by a motley assortment of hideously painted braves of no known tribe. Since then it's been hell on earth. A dozen *kraals* have been looted and burned to the ground, the men, women, and children slaughtered. Other whole *kraals* have disappeared. Men, women, children and livestock have just vanished into the jungle."

"Vanished?"

"As you erase chalk from a blackboard."

The company manager got to his feet. "But that is absurd. People don't just vanish. You have been in the back country too long, Doctor. You need a rest. The bush is getting on your nerves."

"I'm not mad," Carter insisted.

Maastricht did not hear him. "Ya. You had better go down river on the steamer. What you need are lights and music and rest. You have been working too hard. Perhaps a month or so in Brazza-ville or Angola. . . ."

Carter shook his head doggedly. "I'll be damned if I will. I'm going back to my district. There's something hellish going on up there. But I want a company of soldiers. I want rifles and machine guns. I . . ."

Outside the door Nylabo sprang to his feet crying loudly, "*Masai na-kudha, Bwana!*"

"The Masai are coming!" Carter stepped to the door and stared out into the blazing sun.

It was difficult to recognize the two grotesque figures staggering across the parade ground as men. Their heads were matted with clotted blood. Great swarms of *kuuna* flies covered their faces like veils. Red welts circled their bodies. The black skin hung from their thighs and legs in

flaps. As Carter watched one of the men collapsed. The other man staggered on alone. It was one of the Masai runners whom he had sent for help two weeks before.

Nylabo ran to aid the man. "Who did this?" he demanded.

"*Sheitani*, the devil!" the Masai gasped. He sank down in the shade of the building, his sunken eyes beginning to glaze. He talked swiftly, against time.

"He says," Nylabo told Carter, "that barely had they left the *Bwana's kraal* than he and M'Goru were set upon by many warriors. They were Swahili, Masai, Kavirondo, Kikuyu, Wakambas, Morani, Bakussu, and many more whom he did not recognize. All were led by a red-bearded black god who bellowed like a bull that all but the chosen of the gods must go to the place of dying. He says that they were kept captive many days in a big cave in The Valley of the Lost Ones. Each day they were tortured that the red-bearded black god might laugh. When life had almost left them they were yoked as slaves in a long line of captive men and women. They managed to break free."

Carter squatted beside the runner.

"Where . . ." he began, then stood up. The man was dead.

The now awakened natives wailed, "*Hoi! Hoi! Hoi! Hoi! Ee-yah! Ee-yah! Eeyah! Eeyah! Masra Godoo! Kromanti! Kromanti!*"

Cold sweat trickled down Carter's spine as he realized that they were calling on *Kromanti*, the tiger spirit, the terrible Guinea Coast god who lives in a silk cotton tree.

Nylabo fingered the edge of his *assegai*, spat, "*Gimshai* has stolen his soul and not even *Kromanti* can bring it back."

Maastrict dry-washed his fat hands. "This is incredible," he whimpered. "I hardly know how to report it to the company directors. I don't know what to think. I don't know what to say."

Carter settled his gun belt on his hips. "It's not a matter of saying. It's a matter of doing something. This man was tortured to death by some foul, inhuman, fiend. And I'm heading back up bush in the morning."

Ellen Sutliff gripped his arm. "I'm going with you." Her next words chilled his

blood. "*Can't you understand? I've got to know. Barney has red hair!*"

Carter looked at his own sun-blackened hand. A good many tribes were light. As far as color was concerned, he, himself could easily pass as black. "Well, I'll be damned. You don't believe . . . ?"

"I don't know," the girl sobbed. "But if it's Barney, he's out of his mind. I have to know. I have to. And I'm going in with you in the morning."

Life, Carter thought, was filled with problems. But some of them were unfair. He studied the simple faces of the natives now led by a white-robed *felanti* as the *talkee godoo* swelled in volume. A white man falling from the sky might possibly establish himself as a god in the minds of the back bush natives. Still, planes were common. They flew overhead every day. And the man in back of this was sane. There was a profit motive somewhere. No mad man could have linked together tribesmen who hated each other to the death. There was a reason for the burned kraals, for the missing villagers. There was something foul, and deep, and dark here that only full exposure to the light would reveal.

"We'll see," he told the girl. "We'll see."

His mind was made up. Whether the red-bearded black god was Sutliff, whether Sutliff was mad or not, the girl would remain at the station. The back country surrounding The Valley of the Lost Ones was no place for a woman. The lush green valley was Africa raw and untamed, primeval.

THEY had left the station behind them in the dark of the hour before sun-up. Later would come the wilderness of thorns and the tall *veldt* grass that cut like a knife. Still later would come the river. Here the jungle rose in a green-roofed cathedral over the heads of the safari. His hand on the butt of his gun, Nylabo padding at his heels, Carter led the file of burden-laden bearers and the scant platoon of poorly-armed soldiers that Maastrict had begrudgingly given him. He had claimed that he needed the others for the protection of the station.

Daybreak was a misty glow that filtered through the green, that colored the long

gray beards of fungus hanging down from the trees. A bushbuck crossed the trail. A little farther on, a forest hog eyed the men suspiciously and merged again with the green. But for the drip of the night dew the silence was complete.

This was the hour that Carter liked best of all.

The sun was high in the trees when Nylabo sniffed the air suspiciously. It held a stale mousey smell that told him that a colony of monkeys had traveled the trail before them, perhaps even now were perched, gray blossoms of fur, high in the trees above them eyeing the intruders. But there was also another smell, the unwashed stench of men.

"Bwana, I like this not," he began. "I . . ."

Carter had paused as he had spoke, had glanced back down the strung-out safari to make certain that all was well. Black anger darkened his face.

"So you're furious. So what!" Ellen Sutliff stepped out from in back of the massive black who had masked her. She was wearing riding breeks and boots. She carried a heavy 6.5 Manlicher as if she knew how to use it. "I don't care what you said last night. I'm going with you. I can take care of myself."

"With an elephant gun?"

"You're after big game."

"And deadly game," Carter said coldly. "All that you have done is delay us. Take her back to the station, Nylabo. And tell Maastrict that I said . . ."

He broke off sharply, his hand whipping his gun from its holster as the jungle came to life with a sudden smacking of lips and dry coughing. Alarmed, the colony of monkeys swished by over their heads. But there was nothing to shoot at, nothing to be seen.

Malignantly alive, the green wall of the jungle hemmed them in. Then a massive Swahili bearer dropped his load and clapped a palm to his chest. When he took it away again his eyes bulged from his head in fear. Clutched between his fingers was a deadly *kalchi* dart.

"Take cover!" Carter bawled.

Cursing, he forced the girl behind the shelter of a huge gray trunked *baobab* tree. Other bearers were dropping now. All were calling on *Gedeonsu* to save them.

Far back down the trail, the soldiers were firing blindly into the green. Then one of them broke and ran. A poisoned dart dropped him in his tracks.

Another dart "spitt" into the tree at Carter's ear. It was followed by a sharp-tipped poisoned arrow that thudded into the leaf mould between himself and the girl. He caught a flash of movement in the leaves and fired. There was a crackling and crashing of branches and a hideously painted Bakussu fell almost at his feet still clutching his deadly blow gun. With the last of his dying strength the savage raised his blow gun and Nylabo nailed him to a root of the *baobab* with a powerful thrust of his *assegai*.

The attack ended as suddenly as it had begun. Half of the bearers and soldiers were dead. The others were milling helplessly. Carter came to a swift decision. He had no way of knowing how many men were in the attacking party. But through the tunnel of the trees he could see the open veldt. There lay comparative safety. At least they could not be ambushed. To go back down the trail meant to die. Death lay between them and the station.

Cursing, shouting, encouraging, he herded the frightened bearers and soldiers up the trail toward the open ground. The girl backed after them, wide-eyed, but her gun held ready in her hands.

Chanting defiance, hurling taunts, Nylabo backed after the girl.

Carter came last of all, keeping anxious watch over his shoulder. The attack on the safari failed to make sense. Why had it begun? Why had it ended so abruptly? He thought of the dart and the poisoned arrow and smiled grimly.

He had been shot at and missed too many times. For some reason someone wanted him to live. But they also wanted him cut off from all the rest of civilized mankind.

II

THE huge red ball of fire that was the sun had long since plunged into the cool depths of the distant mist-tipped hills. For a long time the only sound had been the snap and crackle of the flames over which Nylabo was cooking the hind quarter of an eland that Carter had shot just

before dark had closed down. Then the swiftly rising night wind began to carry sounds. There was a slithering ripple in the tall veldt grass. A night bird screamed overhead. There was a deep-bellied roar of a lion that had missed his kill.

The girl studied the dubious shelter of the thorn boma in which they were camped and shuddered slightly. This wasn't Capetown or Cairo, or even Nairobi with its long rows of eucalyptus trees, and hotels, and clubs, and Government buildings. This was an Africa that she had never known, a malignantly - alive green hell in which life was held cheaply and the only law was the oldest law of self-survival, kill or be killed.

"But why," she demanded of Carter, "if the red-bearded black god is Barney should his men attack us? Why would he endanger my life?"

His eyes red rimmed with fatigue, Carter stared at her coldly across the fire. "I don't know," he said shortly. "I don't even know that the red-bearded black god is Barney Sutliff. It still doesn't make sense if he is." He got to his feet stiffly. "I do know that I wish that you had stayed at Katumbo as I told you to. Before this affair is over, I'll have enough on my mind without taking care of you."

Ellen flushed and looked down at her rifle. "And there is no chance of outside help?"

"Help from whom?" Carter scoffed. "Three-fourths of the district and border patrols have been dispensed with. And you couldn't get Maastricht or Ismail or any of that white-bellied river station crew up into the back country for all the gold and ivory in the Congo. That's why they hire fools like me. They suck our brains and bodies dry, then toss us aside for younger men."

For the moment he hated the Congo. He hated all of Africa. The very lush richness of its veldts and mountains and jungles made men greedy. And greedy men were cruel.

"I'm going outside to take a look-see," he told Nylabo. "You, Kaka and N'dembi," he ordered two of the soldiers. "Come outside with me."

The men left the boma unwillingly. Night had found them far out on the veldt on the bank of a small stream. Sundown

of the next day would bring them to his camp on the N'gesi. From the camp on the N'gesi there would still be ten days of hard paddling before they reached Carter's almost inaccessible upriver station in the mist-covered hills near the Valley of the Lost Ones.

He circled the boma thoughtfully, then returned to stand at the gate, Kaka and N'dembi crouching behind him, the whites of their eyes rolling wildly in the moonlight. Of death they were not afraid. It was something a man could understand. But they were *bang vir die spoke*.

The whimpering ghosts of dead men were known to haunt the campfires at which they had warmed their bones for at least the space of two moons after they had died. And many men had died that day.

Carter tried to marshal his thoughts and his tired mind flew off at tangents. His station, the work of ten years, his test tubes and his cultures, might all be destroyed by the time that he returned. For all that he had accomplished in Katumbo he might better never have made the out-trek.

HE pounded a clenched fist in his palm. But why? What was it all about? Why was he being saved? For what? The kraal burnings and the thefts and the murders and the mysteriously vanished villagers failed to make sense. This wasn't intertribal war. This was extermination.

His mind returned to the profit motive. The price of ivory was down. But there was gold, lots of it in the Congo, and gold was thirty-five dollars an ounce. More, fabulous prices were being paid for cattle by the military garrisons on both coasts.

Then, too, there were the tribes themselves. Despite all the edicts against it a thriving slave trade still flourished. Incredible as it seemed, in a world where men were fighting and dying for the Four Freedoms, there still were slave markets in Africa and Arabia where a young slave in full strength sold for a hundred thalers. The small veins in his temple began to beat as he recalled Nylabo's translation of the dying Masai's last words

"Each day they were tortured that the red-bearded black god might laugh. When life had almost left them they were yolked

as slaves in a long line of captive men and women."

A rippling in the tall grass brought his mind back sharply to the present. The attack had not been resumed but he knew, the whole safari knew, that they had been followed. The remaining porters and station soldiers were sullenly rebellious. They would have left him if they had dared. They claimed, and rightly so, that they could not fight a death they could not see. But death lay between them and Katumbo. There was no way to go but onward.

The rippling in the grass grew more pronounced. Whatever it was it wasn't human. There was too much disturbance. It was most likely, Carter thought, a bull elephant, strayed from the herd or perhaps a nocturnal hippo enroute to a wallowing hole in the stream on which they were camped.

He cursed himself for not having picked up a rifle before he had left the boma. "Don't shoot!" he ordered Kaka and N'dembi. I think that it's only a hippo on his way to a water hole."

As he spoke the wide spreading black boss of horn of a shaggy gray bull buffalo parted the grass, his little pig eyes were red with murderous lust and his distended nostrils dripping blood as he stared at the three men and the boma.

"Don't shoot!" Carter repeated sharply.

He spoke too late. N'dembi's gun was already at his shoulder. This was a danger he could see. As the rifle cracked behind him, Carter groaned. Slate like fragments had shattered from the horn. The hard horn covered the brains. There were only three vulnerable spots, the nose, the shoulder, and the throat.

"Lower! In the nose!" he cried.

More slate flew from the horn. Kaka's gun, a huge-bored, old fashioned, .505 Gibbs was roaring now. He, too, was shooting high. Then the bull lowered his head and charged at the three men and the boma. Carter sidestepped swiftly, shouting a warning to Ellen and Nylabo. As the charging bull passed him he emptied his .45 into his neck in a futile effort to turn him.

N'dembi screamed once and died, his entrails spilling from his body as the huge beast impaled him and charged on to level the thorn boma to the ground. Screaming

with fear and calling on *Kromanti* and *Gedeonsu* to save them, the soldiers and bearers swarmed from the boma like ants and ran blindly into the veldt grass.

Carter had a quick glance of Ellen and Nylabo as they stood beside the fire. Nylabo had just hurled his *assegai* and was stomping out the fire.

TWENTY yards beyond the spot where the boma had once stood, the pain-maddened bull turned and stood pawing the turf and regarding the golden haired girl standing slim and erect in the moon light.

"Run! Climb a tree," Carter shouted. "He's going to charge you!"

Still clutching her heavy Manlicher, the girl seemed rooted to the ground as the bull charged.

Nylabo was fumbling in the moonlight for a rifle dropped by one of the frightened Houssa. But the girl was between him and the bull. Carter snatched the Gibbs from Kaka's hands and raced across the clearing.

Ellen had sidestepped the bull as gracefully as a matador performing a veronica. But the pain-insane beast had wheeled again.

Carter thumbed the fresh shells into the gun that Kaka had pressed into his hand and knelt between the bull and Ellen. Aiming carefully as the buffalo's huge bulk began to move, he put five slugs into the beast's muzzle. Everyone of the slugs struck home. The old-fashioned .505 Gibbs had a muzzle velocity of two tons. But for all his shots worried the bull Carter might have been using bird shot.

The bloody muzzle charged closer at express train speed. The shaggy head with its great spread of horns dropped down for the kill. He was only feet from the man now. Carter could read murder in the blood-shot eyes—then a heavy gun rocked behind him. The huge beast stopped as if he had run into a stone wall. The shaggy gray body shuddered, dropped to its knees and rolled over on its side pinning Carter's legs before he could scramble free.

Nylabo pulled him out from underneath the brute. "Death come very close." He spat in obvious admiration. "You are truly big *juju*, *bwana*."

"You made the *juju*," Carter told the blond girl soberly.

She reloaded the Manlicher. "I've shot since I was a child." She blinked rapidly to keep from crying. "Barney taught me how."

"At any rate, I was wrong about you," he admitted. "You won't need much taking care of. You can take care of yourself."

His eyes black with hate, Nylabo tugged at Carter's sleeve. "Look, Lord *Bwana*." He pointed a tawny finger at the dead beast's muzzle.

"I will be damned!" Carter pushed his helmet back on his head, cupped a lighted match in his hands, and squatted beside the bull. Three of the five slugs he had fired were visible in the muzzle, scarcely embedded in the flesh. Carter demanded a fresh shell from Kaka and pried out the lead with his knife. It was small wonder the slugs had failed to stop the bull. "Where did you get these shells?" he asked.

The frightened Houssa told him, "Catchum *Bwana* Ismail. Belong give him long side station. All boys catch shells same time."

Carter picked up a gun from the ground and extracted the lead from a second shell. The Houssa was not lying. The second shell was the same. It had been tampered with. For some reason of his own the snag-toothed Arab had sent the escort and the porters out to die with scarcely enough powder in their shells to propel the lead from their gun barrels.

He stared back down the trail through the dark. He had a score to settle with Ismail. But that could wait. Right now he had business with a red-bearded killer who called himself a black god.

FORMS grew in the moonlight around him as one by one the bearers and the station soldiers, *bang vir die spoke*, and frightened by the creeping night things in the tall veldt grass, straggled back into the ruined camp, seeking safety in numbers and in *Bwana Juju's* known magical powers.

When Nylabo counted noses four of the porters and two of the Houssa had vanished. Whether they had run away or been killed they had no way of knowing.

It was plain now, however, that the great bull buffalo had been deliberately herded across the veldt until it had charged their camp.

The damage done was difficult to estimate. It could well cost them their lives. Most of their provisions had been scattered over the veldt or trampled underfoot. If they pushed on they would have to live off the land. And contrary to popular belief, once they reached the land of the great forest game would be scarce.

"Better so make strong *mouti*, *Bwana Juju*," Nylabo advised him soberly. "Else we all go to the place of dying."

Carter shrugged. The Houssa had summed it up when they had said that they could not fight what they could not see. And no amount of the medical knowledge that had established his reputation would serve as a shield against a bullet or the charge of a maddened beast.

Hours, perhaps minutes, would count now. "We'll pack and trek," he told Nylabo. "Line up the safari as best you can. We'll rest when we reach the N'gesi."

Nylabo padded off in the moonlight and began to kick the frightened, weary porters to their feet.

Carter told off a detail to gather up N'dembi's remains and bury them, then crossed to the scattered fire that Ellen was rebuilding. "We're going on," he told her. "We'll eat when we reach the N'gesi. From there in it's going to be even tougher sledding that it has been. But at least we'll be on the river. . . ."

He broke off sharply as a short-shafted arrow smacked into the trunk of the thorn tree beside him, quivering like a thing alive. Ellen opened her mouth to sound an alarm. He stopped her, by pointing to a ribbon of white that dangled from the shaft of the arrow.

"A message!"

"From the black god no doubt," Carter said grimly.

He wrenched the arrow from the tree and examined the head. It was not stained with poison. Crudely printed on the white ribbon in red berry juice or blood was the curt message:

Doctor Carter:

Send the girl back to Katumbo with all of your escort excepting Nylabo. You have my word she will not be

harméd. Then proceed to your up-river station where further instructions will await you. You have been warned. Disregard this warning and the next poisoned kalchi dart that is fired at you will not miss. This is your first and your last warning.

The message was unsigned. Carter handed it to Ellen. "Would you say that your brother wrote that?"

Her eyes grew haunted as she fingered the piece of silk. "I can't tell," she admitted. "It's printed. But the silk that it is printed on has been cut from a parachute."

"That's what I thought," he said grimly.

Ellen read the message again. "I had better go back," she said quietly. "I have no right to endanger your life."

He pointed out, "But that could be a trap to split our party. I believe that it is. You'd never reach Katumbo."

Her chin quivered but she insisted, "No matter what happens to me, there is no reason that you should die. I have been stubborn, bull-headed. But if you'll have Nylabo turn the safari around . . ."

Carter put his fingers over his lips. This was a girl of whom a man could well be proud. For the first time he was glad she was there. "We're going on," he told her. "And we're going on together until we get at the bottom of this red-bearded black god business."

She clung to him a moment, her firm young body close to his. Life was short. Death was near. And now that the wind had died the hot black African night pressed in on them like a shroud.

III

THE distant mist-tipped hills and rolling green slopes were not so distant now. The veldt grass had grown even taller but the trail was well defined. Another half hour's trek would bring them to the river. The terror of the night, of crawling, creeping, unseen things had passed. It showed in the firm stride of the porters and the laughter of the alert Houssa as they brought up the rear.

A short half hour away were the savory cooking pots of the great, sprawling Kavi-riondo village in which *Bwana Juju* had

left his up-river boys. There would be feasting, and boasting, and songs. There might even be a *Ngoma* to celebrate the attack that they had fought off in the jungle. From time to time a boy broke into a few dance steps, slapping his palm against his rifle stock as though it was a drum.

Matching her pace to Carter's, Ellen said, "They're just children."

Carter glanced back along the trail. "With men's responsibilities. They may think and act like children but they fight and die like men." He had not mentioned the message shot into the thorn tree since the night before. "What sort of a man is your brother?"

Ellen's eyes clouded slightly. "He's no better and no worse than any other. He is adventurous. He's had some trouble with the law." She blinked back tears. "But I *won't* believe, I *can't* believe, that he is the red-bearded black god!"

"Back in Katumbo you thought he might be."

"I have to know," she said simply.

"The chances are he's dead," Carter told her quietly.

A few hundred yards farther on a great bend in the river they were nearing formed a water hole. A cloud of scarlet and black finks rose from the reeds. Blue and orange kingfishers filled the air. Black-faced monkeys chattered angrily and climbed into the trees. A white hippo waded out deeper into the water and lay with only its nostrils and eyes exposed. The wildebeeste and young zebra took alarm with a great pound of hoofbeats. Carter shot two wildebeeste. Nylabo ran down another and cut its throat. The fresh meat would be a welcome addition to the feasting and the dancing the boys anticipated.

When the safari was underway again, Ellen spoke the question that had been in her mind since she had met Carter in Katumbo. Lean-faced, burned to the color of saddle leather by the sun, quiet, capable, Steve Carter was different than any other man whom she had known. He reminded her slightly of the statue of Cecil Rhodes that she had seen in Pretoria.

"What are you doing in Africa?" she asked.

"What am I doing?"

"Yes."

Carter packed his pipe and lit it. "It's

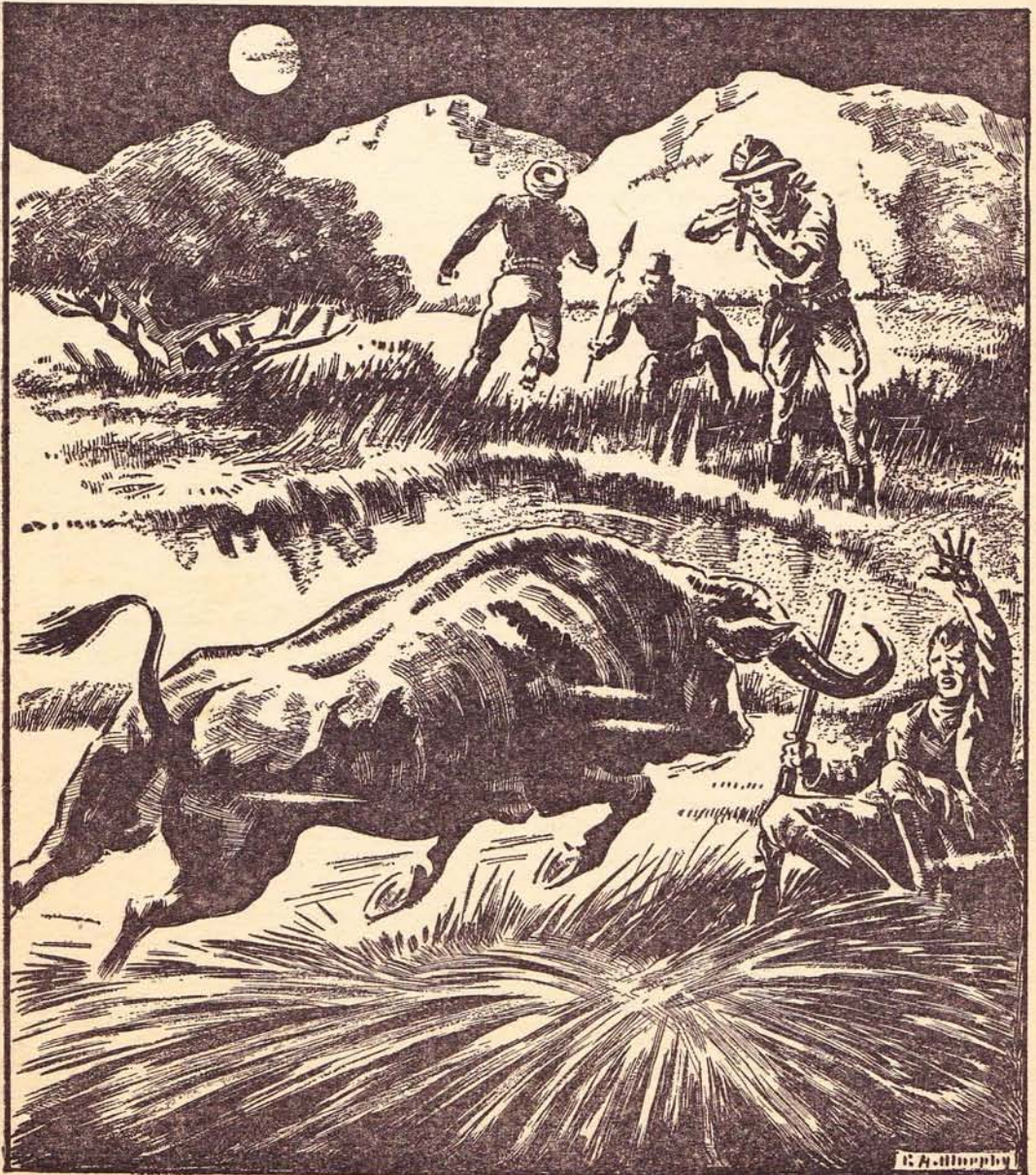
the usual story," he said smiling. "I haven't sense enough to leave. I came in as a traveling doctor for a Belgian syndicate and stayed to take over a district. And I've been happy here. Africa is a medical paradise. It has every disease known to mankind and a few that haven't been named." His eyes began to glow. "It's the richest, most productive, continent on earth but disease and ignorance have held it back for centuries. Tens of thousands of acres capable of supporting millions of men and women support only a handful of natives because of the tsetse and black-water fever."

Ellen laughed lightly. "I see. You're altruistic."

Carter shook his head. "That's a ten dollar word and I'm only a two thaler doctor. Not that I ever collect," he grunted. "I draw a salary for getting out the gold and ivory. The doctoring is thrown in free. That's why the natives call me *Bwana JuJu*."

He strode on ahead to have a few words with Nylabo. He found the Zulu studying the trail.

"Men have passed this way within the hour, *bwana*," Nylabo told him. He pointed to a crushed tuft of grass not yet



The pain-maddened beast charged.

fully sprang back. "All were black but one. That one wore boots with heels." He pointed to a spoor too faint for Carter to see. "Maybe better safari stop and Nylabo go ahead."

Carter considered. Despite their lightness of heart, the porters and the Houssa were dog tired. They had trekked almost thirty-six hours with only a few hours rest. They were looking forward to reaching the village. "How many men?" he demanded. "The same gang that jumped us outside of Katumbo?"

Nylabo shook his head. "That, no man can tell, *bwana*." He studied the spoor again. "But it was seven men who passed and they were traveling with great speed."

CARTER checked the safari mentally. He still had ten Houssa and fourteen porters. All of the porters were armed with the guns of the men who had died. They were only a few minutes' trek from a large village. It was all clear country from here in. "We'll push on," he decided.

"*Aywah, bwana.*"

Carter dropped back to the Houssa, pausing beside Ellen to tell her to make certain that her gun was loaded. "It's just a precaution," he told her. "I don't think that they'd dare to jump us here but we can't afford to take chances."

He took two shells from Kaka's bandolier, pried the lead from both with his knife, poured the powder from one of them into the other, replaced the lead and crimped it with his teeth.

"Can do?"

The big black smiled white-toothed. "Can do."

"Then recharge all your shells and show the others how to do it," Carter ordered. "Half a bandolier of proper shells is worth a full bandolier of half shells that only tickle a warrior's ribs instead of send him to the place of dying."

Kaka passed among the Houssa, explaining. They in turn helped the porters.

Carter rejoined the girl. "Now I feel better. But I should have thought of that last night. I guess that I must be slipping."

She smiled at him, half shyly. "Killing isn't a doctor's business."

"In Africa," he told her, "a doctor is

just another man. He does what he has to do."

Killing isn't a doctor's business. He strode on silently, the note preying on his mind. *Proceed to your up-river station where further instructions will await you.* Whoever the man was, he was out of his mind to think that he could order him around. He doubted that it was Barney Sutliff. The famous soldier of fortune was undoubtedly dead. No man could crash a plane in the Valley of the Lost Ones and walk out of it.

Who was the man? What game was he playing? What in the name of Time could a man who proclaimed himself a red-bearded black god want of a back bush doctor? Where did Ismail come in? Why had he passed out half filled shells? Was it possible that the loot from the burned villages was passing through Katumbo? Was that why Maastricht had suggested that a month or so in Brazza-ville would do him good? That was difficult to believe. Still, trade had come almost to a standstill. The company was merely marking days off on the calender and holding on until normal times. And the lush, rich, virginity of Africa made men greedy.

He froze in his tracks at the shot. The whole safari froze, the porters and the Houssa black marble statues glistening with sweat and carved from the rock of time. The shot was followed by a second, then a third. Then the drums began to pound.

CARTER raced up the trail to Nylabo. The Zulu had just opened his mouth to shout. A dead village sentry lay in the trail, his limp body swarming with murderous big *Siafu* ants and his throat a crimson gash from ear to ear. Carter felt the flesh. It still was warm. The man had been dead only a matter of minutes.

Up the trail, and across the river, a machine gun began to stutter. There was a shrill screaming of women and children. An oily smoke rose through the belt of trees that screened the stream.

Ellen looked at the body and turned her eyes away.

Carter told off Kaka to stay with her. "The rest of you come on. Nylabo has read the spoor and tells me that there are only seven of them."

The Houssa raced after him gleefully,

boasting of the infidels that they would kill and commending their souls to Allah, the All-Merciful and All-Seeing. The porters followed at their heels comparing themselves to Bull Elephants and Tigers* as the Zulu do. This was no night attack by devils. These were men, armed as they were armed, with knives and guns and assegais.

Nylabo ran easily, without effort, a human counterpart of the tawny leopard after which he had been named. "It is a village of three thousand fires, *bwana*, of at least five hundred warriors, not to speak of the *laioni* or the half grown boys capable of wielding spears. Thus is the end of all evil men as with the great snake who tries to swallow more than he can digest and is easily captured by the *laioni* before he can disgorge his prey."

Carter hoped that he was right. He didn't like the sound of the hard dry bucketing of the machine gun. Old trade muskets, knob kerries, *assegais*, and hide shields were poor armor against hot lead. Still, if Nylabo had read the spoor correctly it was five hundred odd men against seven.

The screaming of the women and children grew louder as they raced through the belt of woods and down the bank to the ford in the yellow river. A good many of the huts were on fire and a dense black oily smoke screened the scene of the fighting.

Nylabo plunged into the water with Carter close behind.

When they had reached midstream in the waist deep water a machine gun on the far bank hemstitched a rifle of white in red hot lead a few feet in front of them. It was suicide to go on.

Carter fired at the unseen machine-gunner and shouted for the Houssa and the armed porters to go back. "Fan out in the trees and get that gunner!"

A ragged volley blasted over his head. The machine gun hemstitched again, much closer this time.

Then a heavy gun boomed on the bank and the black machine gunner leaped into the air. A second painted black tore the

gun from his hands and raced on up the far bank to disappear in the clouds of dust and smoke that swirled in the village street.

Nylabo forced himself through the water in great surges. "The memsahib shoots well," he grinned. "Were she of my color and would her father sell her, for such a *Ndito* would Nylabo pay many cows."

Carter had no time for comment. Three huge Bakussu warriors painted in alternate stripes of red and white had rushed down the slippery mud bank into the water to meet them. One of them raised his arm and a hurled *assegai* grazed Carter's cheek. He shot the Bakussu between the eyes and grappled with a second warrior who was trying to brain him with a knob kerrie.

Nylabo deftly disembowled the third Bakussu, then broke the shaft of his *assegai* across his knees lest he be tempted to use it as a throwing spear.

The warrior with whom Carter struggled stank of rancid oil and sweat. They strained body to body, slipping, skidding, almost falling on the muddy bottom, neither man able to use his weapon. Then Carter saw the man's eyes and knew where his strength came from. The pupils of the Bakussu's eyes were contracted to pin points, the eyes themselves were blank and slately. The Bakussu had been drugged into a state where he knew neither fear nor pain.

HE fought on grimly. The Bakussu's drugged condition could explain why seven men had dared to attack five hundred. The red-bearded black god was fiendishly clever. He worked on the same theory that the mad mullahs of Afghanistan used when they sent drugged and religion inflamed Ghazis out to die for Allah, and in so doing break an opening in the enemy's ranks for the main body to pour through.

A thought pounded through his mind as he fought to free his hand and sink the muzzle of his gun into the straining black belly that was trying to force him back into deep water.

Three of the seven were dead. But the fighting in the village streets still continued. Swarms of painted warriors were diving in and out of huts putting all the aged to the sword or the spear and driv-

*The Zulu use the word Tiger for leopard after the South Afrikaner or Boer fashion.

ing the young, both male and female, before them back into the inferno of smoke. They had been tricked. This was no war party of seven. There were hundreds of men in the attack.

He twisted his right hand free and blasted three .45 slugs into the Bakussu's belly. The dying warrior staggered and fell then drifted out on an eddy into a stagnant pool already crimson with blood and lashed white by the pound of mighty tails.

His superbly muscled body gleaming with water, Nylabo stood ankle deep in the mud of the bank and spat, "They are *skelm*. They left a spoor for us to find of but their smallest party while the main bodies of warriors closed in from the other three sides."

Carter nodded curtly. "So it would seem.

It was too late now for regrets.

The Houssa had forded the river and were clicking their knives against their barrels cheerfully as they awaited the order to charge.

Helped by Kaka, Ellen clambered dripping up the bank.

Her blue eyes were blazing as she pointed into the inferno. "What are we waiting for? Those painted fiends are killing women and children!"

Carter made his decision. The drugged warriors could not feel pain but they could die. And a savage attacked was not half so dangerous as an attacking savage.

"Spread out as skirmishers," he ordered. "Make every bullet count. But do not advance any further than the first row of huts until the wind blows the smoke away so we can see what we are doing."

The Houssa advanced to do battle shouting, "Allah Akbar! There is no God but Allah!"

A sudden hushed lull in the fighting followed.

Then a loud and unreal voice bellowed from the smoke:

"The children of the Prophet lie! There is no god in the Congo but the red-bearded black god returned from the Valley of the Lost Ones. And this say I unto you truly. All who fail to worship and obey him must as surely go to the place of dying as the *kypee* bird picks vermin from the hide of *tembu*."

IV

CARTER looked sharply at Ellen.

Her eyes were agonized. "I can't tell if it's Barney," she told him. "But if it is, he's done something to his voice. It's hard, mechanical, unreal!"

"You, black god," Carter called. "I want to talk to you."

A burst of laughter answered. "You were warned," the bull voice bellowed. "There will be no second warning." The voice seemed to increase in power until it beat like a flexible mallet against the drums of the ears of all who heard it. "The tabu is lifted, *Bwana Juju*. I, black god, say that you may die. But the time for death is not yet. And as for the fair haired golden one we will make a priestess of her to serve before our shrine."

A howling of warriors echoed the pronouncement. It was unreal, incredible, insane. In the ten years he had spent in Africa, Carter had never heard anything like it. This is a nightmare, he decided. I'm dreaming this. I'll wake up back at the station—

The bucketing of the machine gun and the death yell of a Houssa cut him short. This was real.

He ordered the men and Ellen to fling themselves on the ground while he and Nylabo tried to outflank the gun. They failed. The black god wasn't taking any chances. By the time that they reached the hut from which the gun had been firing, the gunner had moved farther back into the flames and smoke.

Nylabo wanted to push on.

"No," Carter stopped him. "That's what they want us to do. Once we got inside that smoke we wouldn't have a chance."

They returned to the line on the bank, and hugging the ground, the whole line moved forward taking what cover they could until they were only ten yards from the first row of blazing huts.

Her white face streaked with dirt and her golden hair tumbling out of her helmet down around her shoulders, Ellen refused to leave Carter's side. "If it is Barney, he's mad," she reasoned. "If he isn't Barney, he's a fiend. And I'd rather die with you than fall into their hands."

A ricocheting bullet screamed off a rock

to burn across Carter's cheek. A heavy burst of lead interspersed with thrown assegais followed.

A spear quivered in the ground an inch from Carter's shoulder. A blow gun dart thudded into his helmet. The tabu had been lifted.

Nylabo got to one knee, discarding his rifle, and clutching his stabbing *assegai*. "They come, *bwana*. Through the smoke."

As he shouted, a wave of wild-eyed painted warriors burst through the screen of smoke.

There was a crackle of shots down the line and a slow, methodical booming of the blond girl's Manlicher. Each time she fired she rubbed her fragile shoulder where the recoil of the heavy gun had bruised it.

A dozen warriors fell. Twenty more raced on clutching short-bladed stabbing *assegaïs* already red with blood. The porters, so recently made soldiers, broke and ran for the river, screaming. The Houssa stood their ground. They emptied their guns calmly, then without time to reload, threw them from them and rose up snatching thrown *assegaïs* still quivering in the ground and charged forward shouting, "Allah! Allah Akbar!"

Carter thrust Ellen behind him as a huge brute inflamed with drugs grasped at her hair with bloody hands. The big black stabbed at his throat but Carter stepped in under the blow and jabbed up sharply with his gun butt. The steel butt plate caught the black under the chin and broke his neck.

As he stepped back panting, wiping the sweat from his eyes, he saw Nylabo put his foot on a dead Kikuyu's face and wrench his *assegai* from the breast bone of the man whom he had just killed.

"So fought my fathers and my fathers' fathers in the days of the great Chaka," he told Carter cheerfully. "The Amazulu were a mighty nation. And while Chaka was no god, all men were the king's dogs, killing at his nod."

Ellen saw the blood on Carter's cheek and mopped at it with a handkerchief. "You're hurt!"

"It's only a burn," he assured her. "And it came from a ricocheting slug and not

a dart." He picked the poisoned dart from his helmet, shuddering slightly.

What in the name of Time had he got into? His business was healing, not killing. It seemed this nightmare would never end. Each progressive step grew worse. The wave of warriors who had charged them were dead. Brave now, the porters had returned and were chanting of their prowess. He studied the faces of the dead. The dying Massai had told the truth. These were not men of one nation. Beneath the paint he could recognize Swahili, Masai, Kavironda, Kikuyu, Wakambas, Moroni, Bakussu, and even a few renegade Houssa. They were a motley swarm made up of many tribes.

N YLABO studied the smoking village. The throb of the drums had long since ceased. The shouting and the wailing of the women and the children had grown faint. The smoke had grown less dense as the thatched huts had stopped smouldering and given themselves to the flame. Already the *aasvogels*, the great stinking birds of carrion in this fruitful land where life was cheap were beginning to circle the village in anticipation of their feast.

"Black god!" Carter shouted.

His voice was rolled back by the forest in a mocking echo. There was no answer. The sounds of battle and the screaming had given way to a deadly silence.

He strode across the clearing and into the village street. Only the dead and the dying remained. At the far end of the mud street, hard packed by many feet to cement-like consistency, he could see the last of a long thin line of men and women yoked together winding through the trees. As he watched, twenty or thirty painted warriors forming the rear guard of the slave train turned and shook their *assegaïs* in a last gesture of defiance.

It was useless to follow them. They were too few. Four of the Houssa and six of the porters were dead. Five more were badly wounded.

The Houssa began to fine-comb the huts.

"Now what?" Ellen demanded.

"I'll be damned if I know," Carter told her. "My guess is that if we can find an undamaged canoe or dug-out, we'd best

push on up-river. At least I know the tribes up there."

He told off most of the porters as burial parties and sent two of them back for one of the wildebeeste. After they had eaten, they would search for a canoe.

Nylabo kicked a scattered cooking fire together and began to boil a great pot of mealies while Carter and Ellen walked among the wounded and the dying, doing what little they could do.

An aged black recognized Carter and stretched out his thin withered arms. "*Bwana Juju*."

Carter knelt beside him. The aged black's eyes were already beginning to glaze. "You saw him, old man?" he asked quietly. "You saw this red-bearded black god?"

"No, *bwana*," the villager told him. "It is said that few men have seen him. His warriors fight directed by his voice which he throws from a great distance while he himself sits on a gold throne in the Valley of the Lost Ones."

Carter passed his hand across his eyes. The deeper he got into the affair the more incredible it seemed. There was clever chicanery here. Whoever the man was he was playing on all the known superstitions of the bush.

He took his pocket case from his shirt, filled a syringe with a morphine solution and plunged it into the old man's arm to ease his dying. "What tales are told of this black god?" he asked.

The old man took a brief grip on life. "It is said that he came out of the blue, *Bwana Juju*, in a great silver bird that made much sound. And many warriors of many tribes now serve him for they know no dying in his service and he gives them dreams of paradise on earth."

Carter translated what he had said.

Ellen stifled a sob. "I can't believe it of Barney. What does he hope to gain?"

"Ivory and gold and slaves," Carter replied. He turned to question the old man further but he was lifeless.

BACK on the street, Nylabo reported the village gold and ivory cache, stored up to barter for trade goods, had obviously been broken into and looted. More, the departing raiders had driven off all the cattle.

"It's a racket and a good one," Carter told the girl. "Your brother must have made thousands so far."

"I don't believe it," she said hotly. "I still don't believe that it's Barney. And I won't believe it until—"

An excited shout from Kaka cut her short. "*Bwana Juju*. Quickly come. Here in the elder's hut we have found a bound and gagged *Roinek* in the uniform of the *Selikali*!"

"They've found an English soldier," Carter translated for Ellen. Followed by the girl he strode rapidly down the street to the communal hut that the flames had spared.

The Houssa had released the man, a big man, six feet and more, florid-faced, and dressed in the uniform of an officer of the King's African Rifles. He stared at Carter and Ellen suspiciously, spoke with a clipped British accent.

"I say. Might I ask who you are?"

"I'm Doctor Steve Carter," Carter told him. "I've charge of the Valley of the Lost Ones district for the JanDeers syndicate out of Bruges. And you—?"

The other man fumbled in his pocket, found a monocle and screwed it into his eye before admitting, "I've heard of you. And fav'bly." He strode forward, one lean hard hand extended. "Forgive the nawsty suspicions. I thought that you might be one of the gang that jumped me. But I see now that you're not. Thanks a million, old man, and all that sort of thing. I guess I'd have been a smoked goose by now if it hadn't been for you and your boys."

Carter shook hands. "And your name?"

The other man clicked his heels and bowed slightly from the waist. "Captain Dinwoody Dennis of the King's African Rifles. At your service." He smiled broadly at Ellen.

Carter had been through too much for his mind to function clearly. This was the last straw. "And what in the name of Time," he demanded, "is an officer of the King's African Rifles doing bound and gagged in a blazing native village in the heart of the Belgian Congo?"

The smile faded from Captain Dennis' face. "You've a right to ask." He opened a pocket of his tunic and handed a sheaf of crisp, official-looking papers to Carter.

"I believe that you'll find them in order." He hesitated, continued, "I came here in search of proof of the death of two men." Color flooded his face. "And I had the bloody misfortune to run into this specter of the jungle, this foul red-bearded black beggar who calls himself a god."

"You've seen him then?" Ellen almost screamed.

"I have," Captain Dennis assured her. "What's more, he's the beggar I'm after. A chap by the name of Barney Sutliff."

Ellen gasped, "Oh!" The color draining from her face. Carter caught her as she fainted.

Captain Dennis removed his monocle, his eyes bright with concern. "I beg your pardon. Did I say something wrong?"

"Why are you after Sutliff?" Carter evaded the question.

The story that Captain Dennis told him wasn't pleasant. A notorious South African bushranger and outlaw, a known Nazi sympathizer by the name of Cort Wolf, had been sentenced to life imprisonment on the Rand for murder. He had escaped somehow and had contacted Sutliff. Sutliff had agreed to fly him to Cairo for a certain sum. The two men had last been seen south of Lake Tanganyika. The plane had not reached Stanleyville where both Belgian and English officers had been waiting for the precious pair. The assumption was that the plane had crashed and Captain Dennis had been sent to confirm the assumption.

"I found the plane about ten days' trek from here," he concluded grimly. "And I found Cort Wolf's body. Make a mental note of that should something happen to me." He continued grimly, "Then I safaried in here this morning on my way to Katumbo and ran into this bloody hell. I hadn't been here an hour before those bloody devils jumped us. And don't think for one moment that this Sutliff is a mad man. He's as sane as you or me. And he's cleaning up a fortune on gold, and ivory, and slaves."

Still holding the unconscious girl, Carter filled his pipe with one hand. There were a dozen questions that he wanted to ask but they could wait. He still had his wounded Houssa and porters to attend to.

"And what do you intend to do now?" he asked quietly.

"Get Sutliff if I die in the attempt." His face grim, Captain Dennis added, "And he'll undoubtedly try to get me. You see, there's this other thing now. And I'm the only witness against him. I've seen him face to face and I know that he is the monster who is posing as this red-bearded black god. You're heading where from here, old man?"

"To the Valley of the Lost Ones."

Dennis extended his hand again. "Then if I may, I'll go with you."

"I'll be glad to have you," Carter said sincerely. The girl in his arms moaned slightly as consciousness began to return. "But do me a favor, Dennis. Soft peddle the fact that you *know* that Barney Sutliff is the red-bearded black god."

Captain Dennis drew himself up stiffly. "Oh, I say now. Why—?"

"Because this is Ellen Sutliff, his sister," Carter told him quietly.

The captain's already florid face grew scarlet.

"Oh, I say now," he said. "I do say. I am frightfully sorry and all that sort of thing."

V

STEADILY, day after day, the banks of the N'gesi had narrowed. The water had become less muddy, the current grown swifter. Now, in places, the paddlers had to bend their backs double against the frothing water that sought to sweep the big canoe down stream or dash it against one of the sharp edged rocks that rose from the river bed as if to bar the way into the Valley of the Lost Ones.

Here the leafy branches of huge trees met overhead to form an eerie green tunnel. Black faced monkeys scampered through the branches. Large, gaudily plumed birds screamed raucously. Long, gray, warted, crocodiles lay in the shallows and back-waters watching the progress of the canoe with small, evil, blood-red eyes. Several times they heard great beasts they could not see crashing through the underbrush.

In places where the river widened they could see that they were among the foot hills. Over all hung a shimmering vapor of opalescent mist. Outside of the chattering of the monkeys and the screaming

of the many birds the silence was profound.

"It is like being in a church whose ceiling is the sky," Ellen confided to Carter soberly. "It's like moving through some prehistoric world that mankind has not yet discovered."

His uniform shirt black with sweat, Captain Dennis feathered his paddle. "How much farther?"

"We'll reach the station by night," Carter told him.

He was worried. He had been worried for days. His eyes tried again and again to pierce the green wall that hemmed them in. He had a feeling that they were being watched. It had persisted for days. Nights, he had insisted that they camp on sand spits in the middle of the river. He was beginning to wonder if they had been wise in pushing on to the up-river station. It might perhaps have been better to have struck south toward Kabola or Kanda Kanda. Still, he owed a duty to his natives. They trusted in, depended on him.

As they rounded a bend in the river they caught their first sight of man since leaving the burned Kikuyu village. They upped the beat of the paddles but before they could reach him he had stepped back into the green wall. Later, signal drums began to pound.

Dennis mopped sweat from his florid face. "What name people this place?" he asked Nylabo.

"Akesi," the Zulu grunted. He had taken an active dislike to the captain. Nothing that Carter could say would move him.

"So." Dennis raised one eyebrow. "Leopard men, eh?"

"They're a zoomorphic tribe," Carter admitted. "But they aren't real leopard men. At least we haven't had an outbreak in the ten years that I've been here."

"I don't trust any natives," Dennis scowled. "Give them an inch and they'll cut your throat."

Ellen moved closer to Carter. Her eyes were wide with wonder. "Those drums—"

He shook his head. "They're nothing to worry about. Those aren't war drums." He chuckled. "That's only jungle Western Union. That Akesi sentry who spotted us just informing the village that *Bwana Juju* is returning."

She laughed but her eyes remained wor-

ried. "It sounds more like a party line to me."

They began to pass cultivated fields that had been carved out of the jungle and planted to manioc. The women working in the fields looked up shyly. The warriors guarding them raised their *assegais* in greeting and shouted, "*Jambo, Bwana Juju.*"

The fear left Ellen's eyes. "They like you. They're glad to see you."

"Home town boy returns after losing his shirt in the bloody jungle," Captain Dennis said dryly. "What did you do to make them like you so? Go native?"

Nylabo looked up sharply, his tawny eyes slitted with hate. He did not like this British *bwana*. Both his words and his fists were hard. Several times he had struck at him and cursed him for no other reason he could see but that his skin was of another color.

"No," Carter shrugged. "I merely treat them like human beings. It's a good policy in the Congo."

Dennis exploded, "Bah! What all blacks need is a taste of the whip, and often." He scowled at Nylabo's back. "That boy of yours for example. If he were mine I'd teach him to step lively and keep a civil tongue in his head with a well laid on fifty *kibokos* lashes."

"Wah!" Nylabo laid down his paddle and reached for his short hafted *assegai*.

The Houssa whooped with excitement.

"Stop it," Carter ordered sharply. "Get back to your paddling, Nylabo. And you quit riding Nylabo, Captain Dennis. We're all overstrained. We've been through too much. We aren't ourselves."

"I'm myself," Dennis said coldly, but he resumed his paddling.

IT was difficult for Carter to understand the man. He had grown more arrogant and overbearing with each rising sun. He had failed to do his share of the paddling. He had insisted that Nylabo wait on him. More, Carter did not like the way that the Englishman looked at Ellen. He hoped that he would not have trouble with him. But he was afraid that he would. He had seen other men, too small for Africa, go *cafard*. Here there were no half way measures. Africa either made a man, or broke him.

LATE that afternoon they put in at the Akesi village only a few miles below the station. Carter was relieved to find it standing. The villagers were glad to see him. Cooking fires were lighted. Gourds of palm toddy were proffered. Swarms of naked children followed him up the street. "*Jambo, Bwana Juju*," was echoed from all sides. Comely, full-breasted, Akesian girls, wearing bright colored prints and calicoes wound about their bodies, joked and laughed with the Houssa and openly admired Ellen's hair.

"They're pretty," she said, smiling. "They could be Arab women."

He explained that they were on the old slave trail, that for years the Akesi witch doctors had purchased their vestal virgins from the slavers. As a result the tribe was a mixture of Arab, Wahuma, Orasavo, and half-caste Arabeezi blood. "Why the red-bearded black god has left this tribe alone, I'll never know. Either he's saving them for his final clean-up or he's afraid of them."

Dennis snorted, "Rot. From what I've seen he's not afraid of anyone."

Carter shrugged and proceeded to his business with the chief. After an hour's hard bargaining, and by payment of most of the trade goods he had salvaged, he arranged for two dozen warriors to accompany him to the station and on into the Valley of the Lost Ones when he had organized his safari.

As he rose to return to the river, Nylabo touched his arm and told him that M'Pembi wished to see him.

The aged witch doctor's hut was on the far edge of the village, set apart from the others. A black male leopard skin covered the doorway.

M'Pembi, a wrinkled black gray with great age, sat on a mat in front of the hut casting his knuckle bones in the dust and looking from time to time into the grotesquely shaped earthen pit which he claimed contained the souls of the lost ones with whom he communed.

The old man was not an Akesi. In the days when he had had teeth they had been filed. He boasted that in his youth, during the red rubber days of the Congo, he had been the chief of a cannibal tribe that had never tasted other flesh but that which had come from man.

"*Jambo, Ancient*," Carter greeted him gravely.

"*Jambo, Bwana Juju*," the old man answered. "Your *mouti* is of the body and does much good. But M'Pembi reads a warning in the pot." He stretched out a clawlike hand. "You give M'Pembi *tom-bacco*."

Carter placed a can of snuff in the wrinkled hand. "What is it M'Pembi would tell me?"

Ellen watched fascinated as the old man cast the bones. Captain Dennis who had strolled up behind them, repeated, "Rot. We've no time for witch craft. If you've made arrangements for your boys let's be on our way."

"In a moment."

Miffed, Dennis strode back to the landing, appraising the comely features of the women whom he passed.

M'Pembi stared after him thoughtfully, then passed his wrinkled hand over the pot and a greenish vapor spiraled up like some disembodied serpent.

Ellen's fingers tightened on Carter's arm.

"You come from Katumbo, *Bwana Juju*," M'Pembi said finally. "Death has followed your safari. Many men have died."

Nylabo squatted on his heels at a respectful distance. "Aywah," he said in awe.

"Anyone could guess that," Ellen said, uncertainly. "Let's go."

"Wait."

M'Pembi passed his hand over the pot again and the green vapor turned to red. "Aywah," he droned. "Much blood was spilled in a great Kikuyu village where the banks of the N'gesi are wide and the water is colored yellow. I see smoke and flames and dying. I hear the screaming of women and children. I see a long slave train of young men and women yolked together and guarded by painted warriors."

Nylabo rocked on his heels. "Aywah. M'Pembi is a mighty-smeller out of men."

"And the warning?" Carter demanded.

THE old man's thin body quivered like a leaf whipped by the wind. "The past is not finished yet, *bwana*." He peered into the pot intently. "I can see a white man with a great voice who falsely proclaims that he is a god and black of skin.

He came out of the sky, this man, in a great silver bird with a broken wing and the men of his race believe him dead."

"That's a lie!" Ellen cried hotly. "Barney isn't the black god. He isn't. You—you're just pinning these crimes onto him because it's the easiest thing to do." Her nerves shattered by the bloodshed she had witnessed and the long trek up river, she began to cry.

Carter attempted to take her by the shoulders. "Ellen. You don't understand. You—"

She shrugged herself free. "Don't touch me."

Before he could stop her, she ran swiftly along the street to the landing, climbed into the canoe where she sat sobbing.

Captain Dennis attempted to console her. She told him to go away. He shrugged and paced the crude landing, whistling a popular air.

"Go on, M'Pembi," Carter said.

The aged black picked up the pot and stared into it, the spiral of vapor coiling up on either side of his gray poll like horns. "The *Bwana Juju* is being deceived," he announced finally. "A man whom he trusts is not worthy."

How much the old man read out of the pot and how much he had learned by some mysterious telepathy of his own, Carter never was able to decide. But in Africa strange things happened. And his warnings were always sound. The man whom he trusted could be either Ismail or Maas-trict. The black god had to have an outlet for his gold and ivory and slaves.

Nylabo asked, "You can read this man's name, oh, wizard?"

"Wah." The old man bobbed his head. "I have no need to read it. The lost ones have whispered it in my ear. His name is spoken plainly as—"

He broke off to slap at his wrinkled forehead. But the object that he slapped at only sank the deeper. The circle of watchers pushed forward, curious. Then a moan rose from the crowd. With a gigantic effort of will M'Pembi had plucked the thing from his forehead and held it up for all to see. It was a poisoned *kalchi* dart shot from a blow-gun.

Nylabo leaped to his feet, his eyes searching the leaves of the trees that overlooked the hut. The men in the circle

around the wizard ran shouting for their weapons. Deep in the heart of the village war drums began to throb.

Carter knelt beside the witch doctor. "His name—"

"His name, *Bwana Juju*," the old man said with an effort. "His name is—" The powerful poison surged through his body, holding him rigid a moment, then his toothless chin sank on his chest. He was dead.

A SHRILL scream that rose above the shouting of the warriors and the pulsing throb of the drum brought Carter to his feet. It was Ellen screaming from the river.

A hundred voices echoed the shrill scream. "The black god! The black god is attacking from the river!"

A ragged burst of shots rippled from the landing as a large war canoe grounded in the mud and thirty painted warriors leaped out.

The Houssa and the porters had followed their white *bwana* into the village to ogle the girls. Except for a few curious children, Ellen and Captain Dennis had been alone at the landing.

Carter raced for the river, knowing that he would be too late. It was one man against thirty. The warriors were ignoring the village and the on-rushing Akesi to concentrate on Dennis. He was the center of a milling, shouting mob who were beating at him with *knob-kerries* and thrusting with *assegais*.

Carter heard his gun bark six times. But long before he could come within accurate shooting distance, without fear of hitting Ellen, the savages had overpowered Dennis and had thrust him with Ellen into their canoe that was now surging on up river, white water curling from twenty flashing paddles.

There were no canoes left in which to follow. The black god's men had seen to that. All of the Akesi canoes at the landing had been smashed. Carter ran a few feet along the river bank, tripped on a thick vine and fell. He got to his feet, cursing, his gun barrel jammed with mud.

Then a man rose in the stern of the canoe. Even under the masking paint that streaked his nude body and face, Carter recognized Ismail, the Arab.

"In the name of god, peace be with you," the Arab jeered. "Thanks for bringing

the golden one so far. The black god thanks you."

What else he said was lost. The canoe swept around a bend in the river and was gone.

Carter trudged wearily back to the landing, his mind confused. Ismail's presence this high on the river could mean much. It could mean that Sutliff had finished with his raids, that he had made his pile and was getting out while the getting was still good. He doubted that Sutliff, mad or sane, would harm his sister. But he knew what would happen to Dennis. The Englishman, turned over to the drug inflamed renegades of many tribes, would be tortured until he died.

He stared glumly at the ground. All he could do was organize a safari and follow. Ellen's face rose before him and he winced. She had been so certain that her brother was not the black god. He prayed that she would be safe.

In the short twelve days that he had known her he had grown more fond of Ellen than he had realized. She was a fit mate for a jungle man. She, too, loved the jungle, even if she feared it.

Nylabo, his tawny skin glistening with sweat, broke into his brief meditation. "Lord, *Bwana*—"

"Yes—"

"*Bwana* Dennis struggled fiercely? He shot many times with his gun until it was empty? The painted warriors beat him with their *knob-kerries* and stabbed him with their *assegais*?"

"They did. Many times." Carter looked at the Zulu, puzzled. "You saw it. He put up a darn good fight before he was overpowered."

"*Aywah, bwana*," the Zulu answered. "But here is very strange magic." His keen eyes swept the landing and the churned up mud. "When men fight to the death, they bleed. And nowhere can Nylabo see blood."

Carter's eyes followed Nylabo's.

There was no blood on the landing. There was no blood in the mud. The pretended struggle had been faked. Dennis had been one of the gang.

That was why he had returned to the landing.

That was why M'Pembi had been killed. Captain Dennis had been the man to whom

he had been about to name. And whoever the florid faced man was, he wasn't Captain Dennis of the King's African Rifles. He was an impostor, a fake. He was traveling with either forged or stolen papers.

VI

DAWN of the following day tinted the hills with crimson. Nylabo, who had searched all night, found the spoor where the attacking party had left the river. There were thirty men in the party, traveling fast. The small imprint of Ellen's heels were plain in the soft mud of the bank.

He waited for the rest of the safari to join him, then followed the spoor to a trail that wound down through the hills into the mist shrouded valley. It was a perfect hide-out. Except for the black god's own men, their senses dulled by drugs, and the Akesi, themselves dabblers in black magic, there were, perhaps, in all the Congo no other tribes who would dare to enter the valley.

The remaining Kikuyu porters deserted in a body as Carter made his preparations to descend. Despite the fact that the morning air was biting cold this high, the Houssa clutched their rifles with sweating hands as they stared at the sea of vapor below them. It was useless for Carter to explain that the gray vapors, opalescent in the rising sun, were not the shades of dead men but steam rising from small volcanic springs in the bottom of the valley.

Kaka made their decision for them. "We follow, *Bwana Juju*," he told Carter, "to wrestle with *Sheitani*, the devil, for the soul of the gold haired *memsahib*." He prayed piously toward Mecca. "But may Allah have mercy on our souls."

The Akesi, skeleton-limbed, thin-faced, human bundles of steel wire, said nothing. They knew this valley well. Before the coming of the black god the Leopard men had used it often for certain unspeakable rituals of their own. More, they had M'Pembi to avenge.

Carter and Nylabo leading, the safari began a slow descent, wary of posted sentries. How many men the black god had, Carter had no way of knowing. He did know that he had lost better than thirty men in the attack on the big Kikuyu village. There had been thirty men in the

canoe and at least one man in the trees, the man who had killed M'Pembé. They could be all, or only a small part of his force. But there were only so many rogues in the Congo. He did not know now how the warriors had been recruited. As the interpreter at Katumbo, Ismail had access to the district police records. He had been in a position to know the renegades of every tribe, savage outlaws who had killed before and who would kill again for lust, or for drug-induced dreams, or for booty. The self-styled red-bearded black god had offered them all three.

The trail was narrow and tangled with vines that clutched at their feet like so many green, malignant, blind snakes. As his eyes grew accustomed to the mist, Carter could see that the vegetation here was far more lush than any that he had ever seen before. This was truly a pre-historic world. Bushes grew to tree size. Trees grew into grotesque monstrosities that towered into the mist. With every step he took, it became more difficult to breathe. It was like descending into some fetid hot house. There was a stench of rot and damp decay. A constant condensation dripped from the leaves. Great white and purple, loathsome, orchids clung to the bark of the trees like spiders. Sweat started on his forehead as, far off, he heard a distant roaring of some huge beast in pain.

"*Tembu*," K'Tooma, the leader of the Akesi, told him.

He described a large elephant with his hands, then licked his lips. "Sometimes fall in hot spring. Boil."

Carter repressed a shudder with an effort. He was glad when the trumpeting of the dying beast had ceased. He could not understand how Barney Sutliff had crashed a plane in this white misted green hell and lived. By questioning K'Tooma he learned that although the Leopard men had never penetrated the valley that far, the north end reputedly rose above the level of the south and was said to be rock floored.

Several paces on, Nylabo stopped abruptly, stepped to one side of the trail and placed a finger on his lips for silence.

Carter stared into the mist, incredulous. What appeared to be two animated skeletons, their bony hands dangling almost to

their bony knees, were climbing the trail toward them.

The Houssa stopped in their tracks, their black skin ashen, their breath hissing from their lips.

"No shooting!" Carter whispered. "And stand still!"

As the two skeletons came closer he could see that they were men, huge, ape-like, Bakussu, their black bodies daubed with white clay to give them their unearthly appearance. The red-bearded black god, still playing on the superstitions of the natives was posting a guard on his back trail.

BOTH savages stunk of palm toddy and wove slightly from side to side as they walked, not yet fully recovered from their orgy of the night before. When they saw the frozen Houssa, both men raised their assegais and charged with fiendish glee expecting to plunge their broad blades in the backs of frightened, running men.

The Houssa held. Nylabo and Carter stepped from their places of concealment, clapped their hands over the ape men's mouths before the baffled killers could turn, and plunged their knives repeatedly into the Bakussu's bare chests.

It was over in a moment. They died without an outcry. Carter felt no remorse. These men and their kind had kidnapped Ellen. He smiled grimly as the burly-bodied skeleton slid from his knife. There was one distinct advantage in being a doctor in the Congo. A doctor knew how to save lives. But he also knew how to kill. His first thrust with the blade had plunged it into the would-be killer's heart.

When Nylabo had dispatched his man, they halted for a brief consultation. It was unlikely that other sentinels had been posted. The black god was too certain of himself. They could push on with greater speed now. Every moment might count.

K'Tooma was certain that if the red-bearded black god's camp was in the valley that it would be at the north end where there were reputed to be rock caves in the hills, and beyond the caves a tunnel that was said to lead under the hills and connect with the old slave trail that wound north-east out of the Congo across the wastes of the south Sudan.

Carter and Nylabo still leading, the death safari moved on again, now at a rapid stride, now at a fast dog trot. It was as K'Tooma had said. The heat remained intense but the lush vegetation fell behind them to be replaced by a crumbling rock in which thousands of hot springs bubbled. Here there was no animal life but a few snakes, none of them deadly, and out-sized *vanka* lizards.

At the end of a half hour's trek, a gleam of silver metal shone through the mist. It was Barney Sutliff's plane. Both wings and the tail were crumpled. The motor had wrenched free and bounded a hundred yards away. The door was sprung but the small cabin was intact.

Carter peered into it thoughtfully. There was dried blood on the pilot's seat. There was also a gaping hole where the two-way radio had been.

Carter pointed it out to Nylabo, Kaka, and K'Tooma. He knew the answer to one of the questions that had puzzled him. He knew now why the red-bearded black god's voice had so much force and why it had sounded so metallic. He was simply using a radio amplifier connected to a small portable battery.

Some of his fear left Kaka. "Voice come from box," he nodded sagely. "No God only Allah."

Carter took his place at the head of the safari and motioned it on again. He doubted they had much farther to go. The springs were growing fewer and were more widely spaced. The mist had begun to thin.

A half mile beyond the plane the rock plateau began to climb in a rugged series of slate stairs that some cataclysmic upheaval of the earth had formed. Then the hot springs and the mist ceased abruptly. Across a level floor of stone a sheer face of rock towered five hundred feet in the air.

K'Tooma insisted, "It is the end of the valley, *Bwana Juju*. Beyond here no men may go."

Nylabo spat disdainfully. They had passed no camp. The sentries they had slain on the trail had come from somewhere. There must be *some way* through the face of rock.

Carter's sharp eyes searching the barrier caught a flash of movement between two

great boulders to their right and set flush with the cliff.

"Down! Take cover behind the rocks!" he ordered.

The words had hardly left his lips when a hideously painted warrior stepped out from between the boulders as if to see if the way was clear. A moment later a six-man patrol, armed only with long blow guns, trotted out from the cleft in the rock and headed up the valley at a run. Their eyes were clouded with drugs. They were so intent on what they had been sent to do that they failed to see the men behind the rocks although one warrior passed so close to the small boulder behind which Carter was crouched that he could have reached out and touched him with his hand.

The guard stared after the patrol until they had disappeared into the mist, then stepped back between the boulders.

Carter thought grimly, "There goes my execution squad."

IT was logical to assume that the black god had reasoned that while his ape warriors painted to resemble skeletons might frighten off the Akesi and the Houssa, that he and Nylabo would trek on alone. They would have to work fast now. There would be hell to pay when the patrol found the two sentries dead.

He motioned the Akesi and the Houssa to stay hidden and squirmed across the open space to the rock behind which Nylabo had crouched. "You take charge," he whispered tersely.

Nylabo stared at him, surprised. "You go where, *Bwana Juju*?"

Carter explained, "I'm going to see if I can't knock that guard out before he can raise an alarm. I don't know how many men the black god has. But I do know that we're outnumbered. Our only chance is to surprise them."

He left the safety of the rock and began to crawl. If another patrol should emerge, if the patrol should chance to turn back, if the guarda should come to the entrance again—Carter hated to think what would happen. Thirty feet from the rock he untied his shoes, kicked them off, got quietly to his feet and covered the rest of the distance in a running crouch.

Protected by the rock wall, he flattened his back against it until he could get his

breath, then peered cautiously around one of the big boulders into the dark of the tunnel.

The guard was quatted just inside the entrance. He was a savage, middle-aged Bakussa with an evil, dissipated, face. As Carter watched him he picked up a joint of beef and began to gnaw on it hungrily, glancing over his shoulder from time to time as if expecting his relief.

Carter picked up a small pebble and tossed it out onto the rock plateau across which he just had crawled. The savage reacted as he expected him to. As the pebble clattered on the rock, he dropped the meat, snatched up an *assegai* and rushed to the mouth of the tunnel.

Carter swung his reversed gun like a club. The blow stunned the barrel-chested savage briefly but failed to knock him out. A hoarse shout bursting from his throat, he dropped the *assegai*, whipped a knife from his loin cloth and hurled himself at Carter.

The knife sliced down Carter's arm, slitting his shirt sleeve from his shoulder to his wrist and drawing a crimson line in his flesh. Desperate, he attempted to reverse his gun and the huge savage knocked it spinning from his hand.

"*Tabu* no more," he grunted. "Now *Bwana Juju* die!"

His stinking breath was hot and foul in Carter's face as the white man fought desperately to escape from the powerful arms that were slowly but certainly crushing him.

The Bakussu's flesh was greased beneath his paint. Carter twisted and turned and beat at the leering face now only inches from his own, but he could not break the hold. His breath was coming in painful gasps. Death was not far away. Once his body went limp, the black would break his spine like a match stick.

Carter's eyes bulged from their sockets in pain. Then the Bakussu, not he, went limp. The black arms fell away from his sides. His already glazing eyes incredulous, the savage stepped back staring at the sharp tip of the *assegai* blade that was protruding from his bowels while the wood shaft stood out behind him like an obscene tail.

"Wah!" Kaka admired. "That was truly a mighty throw."

Nylabo bounded across the rock to retrieve the *assegai* that he had snatched from K'Tooma's sheaf.

Carter thank him for his life.

"It was nothing," the Zulu answered modestly, but he was pleased. He added quietly, "It was perhaps M'Pembi's spirit who gave strength to my arm."

K'Tooma nodded gravely as Nylabo retrieved the *assegai* and returned it. "*Wah*. The spear shall stand in a place of honor when we have returned to the village."

Carter fingered the long cut on his arm. He was beginning to wonder if they would return. The odds against them were heavy. Blood dripping from the long cut in his arm, he strode rapidly down the tunnel toward the dim light at the far end. Time, time, time. They were fighting against time.

THE dim light became blazing sunshine. The tunnel opened into a second small cup-shaped valley, green, and fertile, and once beautiful. But the red-bearded black god had turned it into a hell hole and an abattoir. The stinking hides and bloody bones of slaughtered cattle lay in heaps. Inside a high stake barricade, a thousand young black men and women, of a dozen different tribes, milled and shrieked and groaned in pain as huge negroes, under the direction of Ismail, fastened rusted fetters and chains around their necks. Wearing a snow white burnoose, Ismail darted among them, driving them into their places in the slave train with heavy blows of a *kibokos*, the native whip made from Hippo hide.

Great piles of tusks, some gleaming white, some green with age, dotted the floor of the valley waiting to be shouldered by the slaves. Here and there were smaller piles covered with matting and guarded by painted warriors. These Carter knew were gold. Gold washed laboriously from the rivers of the Congo and hoarded in porcupine quills against a day of famine when they could be traded to the white men for life. The wealth represented was tremendous. In the short time that he had been operating, at the cost of a few cheap tricks, and by catering to the baser nature of a hundred renegades who killed for the love of killing, the red-bearded black god and Ismail had stolen enough

gold, and ivory, and slaves to net them hundreds of thousand of pounds.

With an effort, he turned his eyes from the slave stockade to the hills. The green slopes were dotted with caves. Ellen was being held in one of them. The question was, which one.

As he stood hesitating, a drunken renegade Masai, obviously the relief that the dead Bakussu had been expecting, staggered up the slope toward the mouth of the tunnel.

Carter retreated a few feet into the dark of the tunnel. "Don't kill him," he ordered. "But don't let him cry out."

His eyes blinded briefly by the sudden transition of light to gloomy half-light, the Masai did not see the men at first. When he did and opened his mouth to shout a warning, Nylabo pressed an *assegai* against his throat so hard that the sharp point pierced the skin.

"Cry out and you die!" he warned him.

The man attempted to collect his befuddled wits. He glanced fearfully over his shoulder. "Do I not cry out, I die."

Nylabo shrugged and told him in his own language. "The choice is with you. But we have not walked this long way with death for *boori*. Either tell us where the white memsahib with hair like the midday sun is being held a captive or—" He pressed his *assegai* a little harder until a rivulet of blood ran down the man's painted chest.

"Talk," Carter ordered, "or so help me, I'll stake you on an ant hill. Where are they holding the girl?"

The Masai wet his lips and pointed to a cave. "She and the red-bearded black god are together, *bwana*," he said painfully. "But if the *bwana* should try to enter the cave he will surely die. The red-bearded black god has said so."

Carter fingered the butt of his gun. "I'll chance that."

He considered the location of the cave. To reach it, he would have to circle the valley. It would be a simple matter at night. But night was hours away, and every moment counted. At any moment they could expect to hear the excited shouts of the returning patrol, racing back to camp with news that the sentries were dead and that the spoor found on the trail was that of *Bwana Jujw*. If he could res-

cue Ellen and get back to the tunnel before the alarm was sounded, even with as few men as he had, they would have an excellent chance of fighting their way back through the Valley of the Lost Ones to the upper reaches of the N'gesi and the station.

"You come with me, Nylabo," he made his decision. "The rest of you stay here and cover us as best you can. If we don't run into trouble we should be back in half an hour. If we do," he shrugged. "If we do, you'll have to fight your own way back as best you can."

Together the two men slipped from the tunnel into the screening green. By the time they had covered half the distance to the cave, the roaring of orders and the crack of the whip had stopped. From the fires that had been used to forge fetters came the savory odor of roasting meat. Carter looked at the sun and cursed. It was the hour of the mid-day meal. He had hoped that the confusion below them would continue.

Now crawling across a bare spot on their bellies, now running crouched from tree to tree, they reached a spot fifty feet from the cave, unseen.

Nylabo listened intently, said sadly, "The Masai did not lie. The *memsahib* is in this cave. But she weeps, *bwana*, she weeps, after the manner of her kind."

Carter gritted his teeth. If the foul fiends had harmed Ellen—he realized his own impotence and scowled. The odds against them were even worse than he had figured. If he and Nylabo were discovered before they could return with Ellen to the tunnel the best they could hope for would be a sudden death. It was far more likely they would be tortured, perhaps staked out on an ant heap as he had threatened the Masai.

INCH by inch they crawled to the edge of the screening trees and underbrush. Then Carter cocked his gun and dashed across the remaining open space followed by Nylabo. Whether they had been seen from the floor of the valley or not, they had no way of knowing.

Ellen had been kneeling beside a cot, her back to the mouth of the cave. She stood up, frightened, as they entered, her golden hair streaming down around her

shoulders and her white cheeks streaked with tears. She took a short step backwards, staring at Carter as though he were a ghost.

One hand caught at her throat.

"You're dead. They told me you were dead!"

Carter shook her lightly, smiled, "Don't you believe it. Come on. We're getting out of here."

Her eyes lighted with hope, then grew dull. Tears streamed down her cheeks. "I can't go, I can't," she sobbed. "I can't leave Barney. He's sick."

"Damn Barney!" Carter rapped. "He's nothing but a—" He broke off and whirled toward the mouth of the cave as a ripple of shots echoed from the lip of the tunnel, followed a moment later by shrill cries of rage that swiftly turned into shouts of alarm. The blow gun patrol that had been sent to kill him had returned.

It was too late to escape quietly now. If they got out at all, they would have to fight their way. He swung back and stared at the figure on the cot. The man was huge and red bearded. He was as dark as his sister was fair, and further burned a deep copper by the sun. A dirty blood stained bandage was wound around his head. His eyes were bright with fever.

"Okay. So they may get us," he said curtly. "But first, I'll get the dirty killer behind this." He pressed the muzzle of his gun to the other man's temple.

"No, Steve, please," Ellen sobbed. "You don't understand. Barney isn't the red-bearded black god. He's just a figurehead. He's been ill, out of his head since they crashed. They've just been using him as a scape goat. The real brain behind all this—"

Carter swung back toward the mouth of the cave as a man chuckled softly—"is the so-called Captain Dennis."

Behind him, Ismail leered, "May Allah have mercy on his soul."

The big, florid-faced man eyed Carter with amusement. "So we meet again." The half-smile faded from his lips. "Bah. You begin to get in my hair. So help me, for reasons of my own I did not want to kill you. I wanted you to live. But you *insist* on dying."

Carter saw the whole thing now—too late. He had been stupid. The real Captain

Dennis was dead, murdered for his passport and his papers. This man was Cort Wolf, the escaped murderer and bush-ranger who somehow had wangled Barney Sutliff into flying him out of South Africa into the Congo. He lifted the gun in his hand until the muzzle leveled on Wolf's heart.

"What's to keep me from killing you, Wolf?"

"Ellen," the other man smiled. "If I should die, it might prove unpleasant for her. You know Ismail slightly I believe. And without my restraining influence, he would undoubtedly sell the girl with the rest of our merchandise."

Carter lowered the gun. The thought of Ellen sold as a slave was unspeakable. He started to speak, stopped suddenly as he realized that Nylabo was no longer in the cave.

Wolf laughed uproariously at his expression. "Perhaps you realize by now that your magic is not as good as it might be," he spat the words scornfully, "*Bwana Juju*. Your Zulu boy has more sense than you have. When he saw Ismail and me coming he dropped his *assegai* and scrambled up the slope as fast as he could go." His voice grew cold. "Now drop that gun or so help me we'll strip and whip the girl before you."

Carter allowed the gun to thud to the ground. "So now what happens to me?" he asked quietly.

Wolf picked up the gun and weighed it in his palm. "I have not yet decided," he told him.

VII

THE HOT heavy blackness of the night pressed against Carter's eyelids like a weight. There was no sound in the cave but the hoarse breathing of the dying man and the soft sobbing of the girl.

Wolf had timed his departure well. The slave train, loaded with its stolen booty, was moving out when the moon had fully risen. Barney Sutliff would die before it left. Even now his breathing had grown labored.

Carter strained vainly at the *baobab* ropes that bound his wrists and ankles. It was useless. They were even tighter than they had been, shrunk by the night dew,

Grim-eyed, he rolled to the mouth of the cave and stared down into the valley.

It was like looking into some red hell peopled by shrieking black demons. Fantastically painted figures leaped and howled around the fires as they enjoyed to the utmost the last disgusting debauch in which Wolf was indulging his men. From time to time one of them would stagger into the stake stockade to reappear with a screaming young female slave who would be forced to join in the orgy.

Across the valley, in the lip of the tunnel, an occasional streak of orange still lighted the night as the trapped Houssa and Akesi fought a losing battle. Their attackers could not get at them, but neither could they escape. They were trapped between two fires and doomed to die of starvation if the blow-guns and hurled *assegais* did not kill them.

Carter thought of Nylabo and winced. The Zulu's desertion hurt him. After all that they had been through together, it didn't seem credible.

Ellen stopped her soft sobbing asked, "What are they going to do with us, Steve?" The girl was unbound but two evil-faced Bakussu stood guard outside of the cave, glancing in from time to time to make certain that she did not attempt to release Carter.

"I don't know," Carter answered her truthfully. "But Wolf can't afford to allow me to live. He knows that I'll see him hanged."

HE LAY reviewing the past few days. Sutliff had never been connected with any of the raids. It had been Wolf and Ismail from the first. They had planned this thing for months, perhaps for years. And the German had not been lying when he had said that he had wanted Carter to live. There had been a good reason for that.

The thing was fiendishly clever. Wolf had led the attack on the Kikuyu village and had then had his own men leave him tied and gagged where Carter's men would be certain to find him. His plan had been simple but clever. He had met the real Captain Dennis in the jungle and had murdered him. But by posing as Captain Dennis, he achieved two ends. He cleared his own hands of the murder. As Captain Dennis he definitely pinned the blame for

everything on Sutliff by swearing to Carter that with his own eyes he had seen the famous soldier of fortune leading the renegade warriors. And after the purported savage fight at the Akesi village during which he and Ellen had been kidnapped, Carter would be forced to swear that the renegades had seized him. His death would be regretted as that of a brave man killed by drug-inflamed savages under the orders of Sutliff.

Carter stared through the gloom at Sutliff. He felt sorry for the man. How Wolf had induced him to fly him out of the Transvaal and crash in the Valley of the Lost Ones was something that they probably would never know. It had undoubtedly been done at gun point. One thing was certain. After pinning his brief but bloody reign of terror onto Barney Sutliff by building him up in the minds of the superstitious natives as a self-styled red-bearded black god, Cort Wolf would disappear and what the ants had left of Sutliff's body would eventually be identified by the searching parties who found it as the body of Cort Wolf. Wolf had admitted as much. He had boasted that he was assuming a new identity under which he would be enabled to spend his looted fortune safely.

The scuff of feet outside the cave and the challenge of the guards brought Carter to a sitting position.

Dressed for the long trek to the coast, Wolf strode in followed by Ismail and an aged native with a basin of water and a razor.

His red face was more florid than usual. He had been drinking but he was far from drunk. He had dropped his assumed British accent and talked in his normal guttural.

"And now Sutliff becomes Wolf," he gloated. "Shave off that beard," he ordered the native with the razor. "By the time that he is found the *Siafu* will have picked him clean but it is best to leave nothing to chance."

Ellen attempted to go to her brother and Ismail seized her.

Carter protested and Wolf kicked him in the stomach.

"I am clever, *nein?*" he demanded. "When we move out in a few minutes Cort Wolf will be dead and Barney Sutliff will be the dead man's body."

The thought amused him and he rocked with laughter.

"You beast!" Ellen clawed at the face of the man who held her and attempted to squirm free.

"Gently, *memsahib*," Ismail gloated. His yellow fingers stroked the white flesh of her arm. "I am a great admirer of beauty and I would not wish to harm anything so lovely as yourself."

Carter strained at the ropes that held him.

"Take your hands off Ellen."

Wolf kicked him again. "Still, *schwein*. You are not giving the orders here. I am." He ordered Ismail, "Take the girl down and put her in a litter. I have not decided yet just what I will do with her. Perhaps I will keep her for myself. Perhaps we will sell her with our other two legged cattle. She is young, and pretty, and full of fire. She should bring a fancy price."

ISMAIL ran his tongue across his lips, then shrugged and did as he was told. Picking up the girl in his thin but powerful arms he carried her kicking and screaming from the cave.

Wolf laughed heartily. "She is a tiger cat, nein? It will be a pleasure to tame her."

The veins in Carter's face and throat stood out in corded knots as he worked at the ropes on his wrists, in vain.

The German eyed him thoughtfully. "And as for you, *mein freund*, I should kill you, but I shall deny myself that pleasure." He looked at the painted Bakussu scowling in the cave and chuckled, "Instead I shall leave you here for my renegades to deal with. They should be in a fine temper for torture when they find I am not returning from the coast with the many white men's pleasures that I have promised them."

Carter said nothing. There was nothing he could say. The Bakussu knew only their own tongue. True to form, the German was double-crossing even his own killers.

The native barber finished shaving Sutliff and left. Wolf strode after him to the mouth of the cave. "And so, good by."

Carter shook his head doggedly. "No. This isn't goodby. This is just *auf wie-*

dersehen. I'll meet you again, Wolf, if I have to follow you to hell."

The German laughed heartily at the thought and left the cave without looking back. One of the guards left with him. The other remained at the mouth of the cave.

Down in the valley the drunken shouting had turned into screams of fear and pain as the vicious guards whipped the slave train into line for its long trek to the coast.

Carter lay staring at the rising moon. It was, he realized, the darkest hour that he had ever known. Death did not matter so much. Nor did his coming torture. But Ellen's was one of those screaming voices. He felt that he had failed her.

He tugged and pulled at the rope on his wrist. It held. He had no hope of freeing himself. He would be forced to lie here in the cave and watch Ellen move out with the slave train without being able to help her. On the cot, Sutliff began his death rattle. He was well out of it, Carter thought.

He lay staring down into the valley between the legs of the guard whose bulk loomed large against the newly risen moon. Watching the scene below with interest, the Bakussu grunted suddenly in annoyance and slapped at his naked ankle. Then his big body topped slowly, as a tree might fall, for no apparent reason.

A long blow gun in his hand, Nylabo materialized out of the night, stepped over the body, then paused, looking at Carter, grinning, as the eerie screech of a leopard echoed through the valley to be answered in kind from the far side of the cup.

"*Akesi, bwana*," he grinned. "M'Pembu's soul is making *mouti* for his children. The Leopard men run in the moonlight and even Nylabo respects them for they are of his blood."

Carter rubbed his eyes as a lithe black figure slipped by the mouth of the cave. He could not tell if it was man or beast but a moment later the eerie screech sounded again to be followed by a man's cry of terror as a Leopard man made his kill.

Nylabo cut the ropes from his wrists and ankles. "The Houssa are still holding the tunnel, *bwana*," he reported. "But under the cover of night the Akesi have slipped

into the valley. Many men will die under their claws by morning. As for myself, I thought it best that one of us be free." He grinned, white toothed. "That is why I played the coward when you were captured."

Carter stood up stamping his feet and rubbing at his arms to restore their circulation. He was ashamed of his former suspicions. He might have known that Nylabo would not desert him.

"We'll have to work fast. The slave train is moving out and there are only a handful of us against a hundred."

"But moonlight is not daylight, *bwana*," Nylabo answered. "Many of the guards are drunken. Then, too, there are the slaves."

The slaves. Struck by a sudden thought, Carter plunged out of the cave and stared down into the valley. The scene below him was one of indescribable confusion. Wolf was bellowing hoarse orders. Men were attempting to stamp out the fires that had suddenly transformed them into targets. But they could not stamp out the moon.

The long, unwieldy train of slaves, linked together in groups of twenty, moved a few yards and stopped, defying the whips of their drivers to stare with frightened eyes into the hills in which the leopards were screaming.

"Get them on. Get them moving!" Wolf bellowed.

Beyond him, in the reflected gleam of a fire not yet quite stamped out, Carter could see Ellen, her face buried in her hands, seated in a litter carried by four men. Ismail was standing beside the litter, her .505 Gibbs in his hands, an evil scowl on his face as he looked up into the hills for a flash of movement at which to shoot.

"On. Get on, you black devils!" Wolf bellowed.

UNDER the lash of the whips, and the prodding of *assegaïs*, the lumbering, heavy-laden, human train moved forward slowly toward a small cleft in the hills on the Sudan side of the cup. Carter recognized Wolf's strategy. It was useless to attempt to comb the hills in the moonlight but once the slave train was out of the valley it would be safe. Wolf had a hundred warriors against a handful. On level

ground, the Akesi would not stand a chance.

He plunged on through the underbrush, shouting, "Head them off, K'Tooma. Don't allow them to pass through the gap."

The blood curdling screech of a leopard answered.

Ismail fired at the sound of Carter's voice and the heavy slug smacked into the trunk of a tree only inches from his ear. Regardless of the noise he made, or the target that he presented, he plunged on down the slope toward the spot where he had last seen the litter.

As he reached the floor of the valley, he shouted, "Slaves, rise up against your evil masters. Strike them down with your chains. The red-bearded black god is dead. He can no longer harm you. *Bwana Juju* tells you so!"

The screaming and moaning of the chained slaves ceased. It was replaced by a low, growing roar. There were many warriors in the train who did not wear their chins with pride.

"He lies," Wolf shouted desperately, emphasizing his words with pistol-like cracks of his whip. "Move on lest the wrath of the red-bearded black god strike you dead."

Ellen cried out from the litter, "He lies and not *Bwana Juju*. Rise up, slaves. The very bands of iron on your wrists are weapons."

The slave train swayed, undecided. Carter had almost reached the litter when a group of twenty slaves broke from their place in the line and hurled themselves upon the renegades who a moment before had been their masters. They clawed at them with their hands and beat at their evil faces with the heavy irons on their wrists until nothing was left but bloody pulp.

Another group left the train. And still another, and another. The tables had suddenly turned. The slaves had become the masters. Some of the renegades fought, plunging their bloody *assegaïs* time and time again into the press of bodies before they died. Others fled shrieking into the hills to be run down by the Leopard men and mangled.

Carter plunged on toward Ismail. The Arab had expended all of the shells in the gun. As Carter loomed out of the moonlight he threw it from him and drew his

knife only to have it fall from nerveless fingers as Nylabo's *assegai* pierced his throat.

Carter held Ellen, briefly. "You're all right?"

When she had told him she was unharmed, he left her in Nylabo's care while he fought his way through the surge to Wolf. He found him encircled by slaves who were battering at him with their chains while he begged hoarsely for mercy. Carter started to interfere, then turned back again toward Ellen. It was Kismet. The German was dying as he should die. There were certain natural laws of the jungle. One of them was that all men born in it were free. And Wolf had defied that law. It was right that he die under chains.

By the time that Carter had forced his way back to the litter, Ellen was standing beside it, her golden hair gleaming in the moonlight. The noise of battle was dying down and the former moaning of the slaves had been replaced with a rising triumphant chant accompanied by the clash of fetters.

Here and there in the hills a gun flashed

fire. Here and there a leopard still screeched. But both Ismail and Wolf were dead. Their power had been broken forever.

Carter felt suddenly tired. He was sick of bloodshed and fighting. He wanted to return to his station and his test tubes, he was, after all, a doctor.

His mission in life was to save life, not to take it.

He stood looking at Ellen, tongue-tied, wondering how to tell her just how much he would miss her when she had returned to the outside world. "Well, I guess," he said finally, "I guess that it's all over."

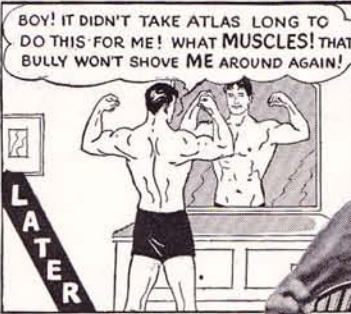
Her eyes were shining. "No," she shook her head. "It's just begun."

Carter stared at her, puzzled. "It's just begun? I am afraid that I don't understand."

Behind him Nylabo grinned, white-toothed. He understood. And *Bwana Juju* would understand. All that really remained to be said was for the maiden's father to make known how many cows he would take in exchange for his golden haired daughter.



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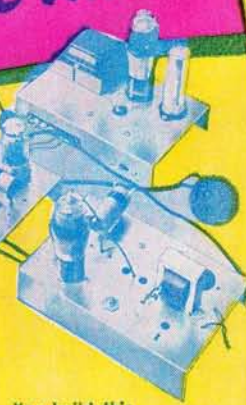
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